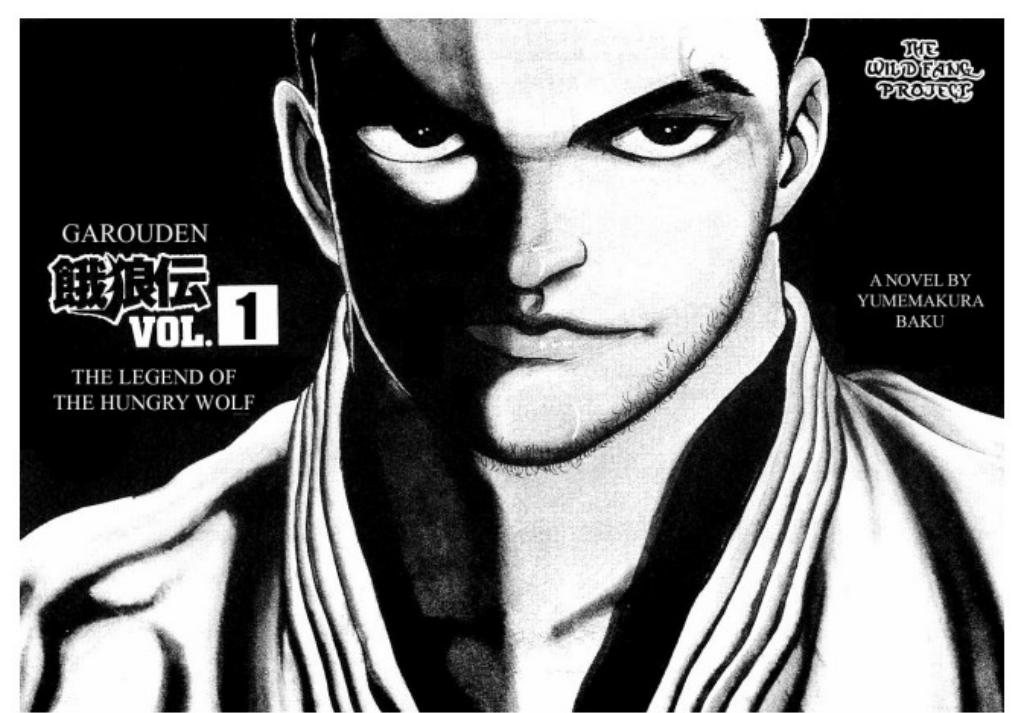


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THE
WILD FANG
PROJECT

GAROUDEN

餓狼伝
VOL. 1

THE LEGEND OF
THE HUNGRY WOLF

A NOVEL BY
YUMEMAKURA
BAKU

GAROUDEN: THE LEGEND OF THE HUNGRY WOLF

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[001]

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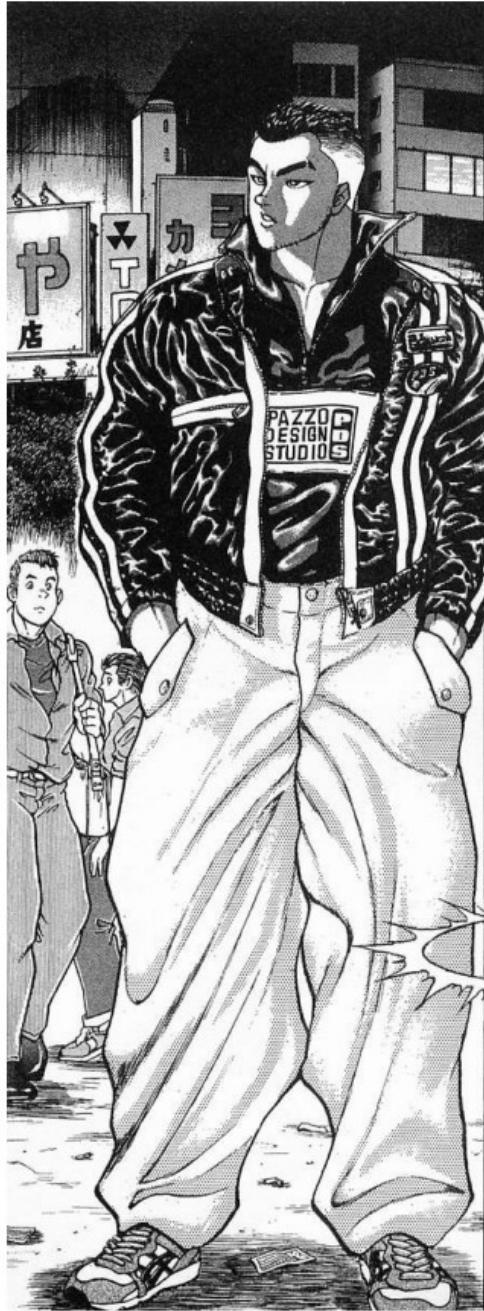
Prologue

Even in a crowd he somehow stood out. It wasn't the way he was dressed, nor were his looks

anything more than average. In fact it was more the opposite. His nose was flat and his lips were thick. His shoulders, eyes and frame were also oversized. Although you wouldn't go so far as to call him ugly. He certainly wasn't charming, but his features were well balanced, in their own way. At a glance, he seemed like the kind of guy you could see anywhere. If there was a group of people coming towards you, your line of sight would stop when it hit him, just for a moment, before he walked straight past you. That was the kind of way he stood out.

He was big. Quite tall. About half a head taller than the rest of the crowd. He looked to be around six foot, but just because someone is six feet tall doesn't mean that they catch people's eyes the way he did. It wasn't his height or his frame that caught the attention of so many other people. No, it was because he had an air of mystery about him. It was that mysteriousness that made people notice him.

He was wearing a cotton shirt over a pair of comfy cotton slacks. His shirt was off-white and over washed to the point of fading. An open leather jacket hung from his shoulders over his shirt. His clothes were a little too big. It looked as though he chose the kind of clothing that wouldn't constrict his body.



[008]

Everything he was wearing was a little dirty. It's not that the clothes he wore were dirty in places, but more they had been stained with the filth of his lifestyle.

He looked beat up and worn out, but strangely it suited him. It was probably because of the way he held himself. The feeling he gave off didn't come from his clothing, but rather from inside. The warmth of his body, his smell ... the tell-tale signs of a human pushed through his clothing and hung in the air.

He looked as though he was taking a casual stroll,

but he hadn't let his guard down. He looked older than 30, but just how much older was difficult to tell. He would have been around 35 or 36, but he moved his body like someone in their 20's.

The month of March. The place; the Kasuga Grand Shrine in Nara, halfway down the path towards the shrine archway. That pathways inside Nara Park were overflowing. There were a lot of young people there as high schools and universities were out for summer. Groups of senior citizens, probably from a tour bus, were wandering towards him. There were even foreigners with cameras hanging from their necks. There were a lot of young people wearing jeans. Unlike in the wintertime, everyone was dressed in bright, colorful clothing.

Peppermint green, yellow, orange, blue, pink ... all kinds of colors walking about. The afternoon sun poured over the land and fingers of light poked

through the tree tops. Just before the entrance of the archway, there was a single storied structure made from raw wood with a gabled roof made from cypress bark, a stable, on the right hand side. The shadows that fell on the wood from the treetops above rippled with the breeze. The wind was refreshing, not piercingly cold.

[009]

All the smells that had hung in the air since he arrived started to melt into the wind. The smell of deer and exhaust gas had followed him all day, but now there was also the subtle smell of grass that the wind had carried in from Mt. Wakakusa. He passed through the archway, which was lined with various stone lanterns on either side. Most of them were for people to pay their respects, and it was said there are around 1760 of them.

He could make out muffled voices in the distance.

The voices were getting closer. It seemed as if someone was being chased.

“Get back here!”

“You little shit!”

The voices got louder. The crowd in front of him split open. From there a young man wearing jeans came running towards him. The young man was pushing people out his was with his hands and elbows as he turned and looked behind him. It seems that he was trying to get a look at the people chasing him. The young man was still fairly young and didn't slow down, not even when he turned to look behind him. The young man ran straight into him, as he had stopped walking, and fell backwards.

“Ah!”

The young man let out a cry and turned his attention

to the one had run into. The young man's fine features looked shocked as he looked up towards the man's jack-knife smile. The young man looked about 17 years old. He had shoulder length hair and was wearing what looked like a jacket. Their met eyes for only a second. The young man got straight back up and again started to run. There were three men chasing him.

[010]

“He's a pick-pocket!” one of them yelled out. The young man was at a disadvantage. The crowd he was trying to push through was his main obstacle. The men chasing him ran though the path he had carved in the crowd. After about 10 meters or so, they finally caught the young man. People in the crowd slowed him down once the men chasing him called out that he was a pickpocket. Out of nowhere the young man gets a smack. One of the men whipped off his jacket as the young man fell to the ground.

“What the hell are you doing?” the young man said.

“You're going to give that money back!”

“What money?”

“Don't play dumb with me, I'm talking about the money you took back there,” the man said, hitting the young man again. The man's face was turning red. He was certainly angry, but that probably wasn't the only reason his face was turning red. He had been drinking as well. The three men didn't look all that respectable themselves. The man who hit the young man was wearing sunglasses. They seemed like the kind of thugs you would find roaming the streets at night.

“I don't know anything about your money,” the young man said, propping himself up off the ground with his right hand. The young man then glared up at the three men, a line of blood forming

downwards from the corner of his mouth. He clenched his left hand into a fist and wiped the blood from his face. He looked down at the blood on his fist and then turned his glare back to the three men. He pulled in his sneaker clad feet and propped himself up.

“You son of a bitch!” the man with sunglasses yelled as he moved forward to kick the young man with the tip of his foot. The young man jerked his body backwards to try and dodge the blow, and the man's foot sailed narrowly past his chin.

[011]

“Ah!” the man in sunglasses yelped, his kick to thin air causing him to stumble forwards. The young man used his knees to push himself up into a standing position and spat crimson to the ground.

“That was close,” the young man said, a knife-like smile forming on his lips. It was a wry grin of defiance. A number of the pedestrians has stopped walking and had been watching from a distance, waiting to see how the situation would play out.

“Hand over the money, kid,” said the tallest of the three men as he stepped in front of the young man. He had a deep and calm voice.

“I said I don't know what you're talking about,” said the young man as he took a slight step backwards.

“Look kid, I saw you take that money and run.”

“Superb eyesight you've got there.”

“You're not funny, kid,” the tall man muttered. His eyes were narrow and his tone was eerily calm. His movements flowed like water as he shuffled his body forward. The young man turned to flee but

the tall man was too fast. It was the kind of speed that could only be achieved through training. The tall man threw his left fist at the young man's nose. The young man pulled his head back and dodged the attack, readying himself with boxing stance. He bent his arms at his elbows and brought them up to either side of his face to protect his head. The tall man, as if reading his movements, let his right fist fly towards the young man.

[012]

The tall man's fist came up from below to form an uppercut. The young man, his arms still on either side of his face, flung his head backwards to dodge the blow. His shoulders, arms and back followed suit and the young man fell backwards. The tall man came in from the side with a kick towards the young man's head. The young man didn't try to dodge; he did the opposite and lunged towards the tall man's leg. The two of them were soon in full

contact, the young man using both of his arms to latch on to the tall man's right leg. Because he had been weighed down, the force of his attack was cut by half. The tall man's punches were polished, but his kicks were rusty.

The young man stood up, still holding on to the tall man's leg. The tall man threw another punch at the young man as he became unbalanced. It hit him on the nose, but because he had lost his balance, it didn't do much damage. The young man then curled his right leg around the tall man's right leg and jerked it upwards, causing him to fall to the ground. It was just then that the two remaining men came at the young man with an attack.

The young man clung to the side of one of the men. The man with sunglasses sunk his knee into the young man's stomach. The young man groaned as he doubled over. That was when two police officers came running over. It wasn't clear whether someone had reported a disturbance or if they had

spotted the fight while on patrol.

“That's enough!”

“What's going on here?,” the police officers shouted as they ran over to stop the violence.

“Fighting are we?” one of the officers said, turning their attention to the young man and the three men who had finally been split up.

[013]

“No! This kid stole some money from us,” the man wearing sunglasses said.

“Money?” the guard asked.

“Yeah, money. The kid's a pick-pocket”

“Is that true?” the officer asked, turning to face the young man. The young man shook his head.

“I don't know what they're talking about, I haven't stolen any money” said the young man. The sudden change in his demeanor was amazing. His defiant expression was gone, replaced with a look of fear in his eyes.

“Well, then why were you running?”

“Because these guys were yelling and started chasing me. Anyone would run, these guys look like gang members.”

“You little shit!”

“Watch it!” the police officer snapped.

The young man moved away as if trying to hide in the policeman's shadow. Blood started to trickle down from his nose.

“I saw the boy take the money with my own eyes,” the tall man said, stepping in front of the guards, “go ahead and take a look in his jacket pocket.”

“And what if we don't find anything?”

“Just take a look.”

When the tall man said that, the young man took off his jacket and threw it to the ground.

“Here, search it yourself.”

The man wearing sunglasses picked up the jacket and scrunched it up in hands. Without putting his hands inside the pockets he groped at the jacket, grabbing fistfuls of fabric at a time, but was unable to find anything.

“Shit!” he said, flinging the jacket to the ground.

“Hey, that's my jacket!” the young man said before picking it back up.

“What was stolen?” the officer asked.

“I haven't taken anything,” the young man piped up.

“My wallet,” the man wearing sunglasses said.

“I haven't got your wallet,” the young man said as he put his hands in his pocket and pulled them inside out. He went to far as to pull his shirt up a little over his belt.

It was then that the man, who had been watching the events unfold from within the crowd turned his six foot tall body and walked away with the same rhythm that he had come with. The young man chased him with his eyes as his back disappeared into the crowd.

“You threw it somewhere, didn't you?!” the man wearing sunglasses said.

“I didn't throw it anywhere because I didn't steal it. If I had thrown it somewhere, it would be lying on the ground around here, wouldn't it?”

“You must have given it to someone!”

“I don't know what you're talking about.”

“Fuck you, kid!”

“Why don't we take this conversation down to the police station?” Said the officer, attempting to calm the situation.

“Police station?” said the man wearing sunglasses.

“There the two of you will be able to give your own sides of the story.”

“Are you kidding me?”

“Someone's just picked my pocket, I don't have time shoot the breeze in a police station.”

[015]

“Be that as it may, I can't just let the two of you...”
the officer started.

“Did anyone here see what happened?” the other officer called out to the crowd, cutting off the first officer. He got no answer.

“Let's go,” said the tallest man, placing his hand on the shoulder of the man wearing sunglasses.

“Go?”

“Yeah. Come on...”

“But Shimamura!”

“Let's go!” said the tallest man of the three, Shimamura, as he pushed his open palm into his friends back.

“And the wallet?” asked one of the officers.

“I guess he dropped it after all. We're going to go take a look for it.” Shimamura said, staring intensely at the young man.

“Leave no stone unturned!” said the young man. Shimamura gave no response. He just glared at the young man for a moment before turning his back on him and walking away.

[016]

Part One : The Duel

Chapter I

Bunshichi Tanba was walking down a tree-lined pathway. It was a trail that broke off from a slightly elevated spot on the Old Willow Path inside Nara Park. It was narrow. Not the kind of path a lot of people came down. Long, dry grass was creeping in from either side of the walkway, limp and withered. That's where Bunshichi Tanba walked, his thick legs taking out dry blades of grass as he walked.

There was a lot of green grass mixed in with the dried grass. There was no mistaking that the changing seasons had spread that pale green around and would continue to do so until it covered everything. The green of speed wheel flowers and the yellow of sunflowers could be seen in spots that had gotten a lot of sunlight. The leaves no longer shed shadows from the treetops

above. All you could see now were the red, pointed sprouts of new life. Compared to the lower end of Nara park, here it felt almost as if spring was running a little behind schedule. Sunlight fell straight through treetops as the leaves had yet to properly sprout.

The trail was a little steep. The sound of dried leaves crackling underfoot echoed through the air with each step Bunshichi Tanba took. He had broad shoulders, and the stray branches leaning in from either side jerked back as they hit his body. A soft breeze was rustling through the trees. It carried the soft smell of dried bark.

[017]

Before long the path stopped abruptly in a strange clearing in the forest. Long withered grass was creeping in from all sides as if this spot had been completely forgotten about. The clearing wasn't all

that big; it would have been about the same size as a tennis court if were the same shape. There was a large cherry blossom tree at the other end of the clearing, which seemed out of place. There stood a small, five leveled stone pagoda to the right of the tree. It was a little taller than Bunshichi. There were three more, slightly smaller objects lined up next to the pagoda. Bunshichi stopped in his tracks and scanned his surroundings. His right hand was waiting. He scratched behind his ear with his fat, hook-like index finger.

“Alright” said Bunshichi in a thick, deep voice, “It's time to come out now.” He seemed to be calling out to someone behind him. Once the words had left his mouth, there came the sound of footsteps through through the dried grass from behind. The sound was getting closer. And then the sound stopped. Bunshichi took a few steps away before turning around. There was a young man standing at the foot of the path. It was the young man from before; the pickpocket who had been

chased by those three men, and who had bumped into Bunshichi near the temple archway. He had his hands in his pockets and stood with his legs slightly apart. The young man turned his head towards Bunshichi and looked up at him through his shaggy shoulder length hair.

[018]

He had sharp, penetrating eyes.

“You knew I was there, huh?” the young man asked.

“What do you want?” Bunshichi asked. The young man let out a short whistle and raised his head.

“Don’t play dumb,” the young man said, striking a pose. He was stained red from his nose to his lips. He looked like some kind of majestic wild beast.

Some kind of carnivorous, predatory feline. A young panther. That's what he looked like.

“Play dumb?”

“I'm talking about the money,” the young man said, a razor sharp grin running across his face.

“Oh, you mean this?” Bunshichi said, pulling a small black wallet from his pocket. The young man had shoved it into Bunshichi's pocket when he ran into him near the shrine.

“I'm gonna need that back.”

“Give it back?”

“Yeah.”

“You mean hand it back to that guy with the

sunglasses?"

"I mean give it back to me"

"Back to you, huh?"

"C'mon man," the young man started, "I put my life on the line stealing that. It's mine now," he finished bluntly.

"Oh really?"

"There was nearly 300,000 yen in there when I looked. I'm gonna need you to give that back."

"322,000 yen to be exact."

"You looked?"

“I looked.”

[019]

“Shit...,” the young man said before spitting on the grass that lay at his feet, his hands still firmly in his pockets.

“But I thought I was going to get to keep it,” said Bunshichi.

“I risked my neck for that cash. Did you really think I was going to just let you walk away with it? I was just letting you hold on to it for me. That's why I was following you. Being so big, you are easy to find, that's why I had you look after it for me.”

“Why didn't you call out to me right away?”

“Because you decided to come down this deserted path. It's a lot safer to try and talk to you when there is no one else around.”

“That makes sense,” Bunshichi said, relaxing a little.

“Give me the cash.”

“What would you have done if I had left the park still holding the wallet?”

“I would just have to pretend that I didn't know anything. If things got really bad I would have just ran for it.”

“...”

“I just got a little nervous. So I didn't say anything before you started walking away.”

“I see.”

“Gimme the cash”

“That's a nice story, but it's doesn't quite hold water.”

“Oh really,” as soon as the young man had spoken, Bunshichi put the wallet back in his pocket.

“What are you doing!?” the young man asked, his voice was stern but his heart nearly jumped out of his body. He looked like he was ready to explode.

“Maybe I should try my luck with you and get to keep the money.”

“What!!?” the young man yelled, his hands now out

of his pockets.

[020]

He turned and walked towards Bunshichi.

“Are you serious?” he said, still making his way over.

“I’m still thinking about it,” Bunshichi said to the young man now standing in front of him.

“Give it back, man,” the young man said, pushing his open palm towards Bunshichi.

“Well then...,” said Bunshichi, his hands still in his pockets. He looked the quiet young man over with his cold, emotionless eyes. Out of nowhere the young man flung his leg up into the air. Unlike the a little while ago when he had that run-in with the

thugs, now he showed amazing force, almost like he had purposely pretended to be weak. His leg was straight and headed for Bunshichi's crotch. It had incredible spring. It was if he had been hiding his natural ability this whole time. The spring in his leg was born from his ankle, knee and back. The tip of his foot missed Bunshichi's crotch, flew upwards and left a slight mark on his baggy shirt. It looked as if his foot would have hit the bottom of Bunshichi's thigh, but his leg wasn't long enough.

Bunshichi had moved his body back about half a step. The young man had also jumped back quite a distance. There was now around three meters between them. Bunshichi still had his hands in his pockets. It was then that the young man finally noticed the mysterious air that seemed to wrap itself around Bunshichi.

“What? Do you train as well?” the you man asked, relaxing his stance a little and clenching his hands

into fists. Bunshichi was still standing casually on the grass.

“I’d say you were holding yourself back just a short while ago.”

[021]

“Heh,” the young man said, a beast-like grin forming on his crimson lips, “Even the cops would have started chasing me if I had started showing off.”

“Huh.”

“It was just that tall guy that was acting a little weird.”

At that Bunshichi removed his hands from his

pockets. He was holding the black wallet in his right hand. He flung towards the young man. The young man caught it in mid-air with his right hand.

“Why?” he asked.

“Because I've got no plans to try my luck against *four* opponents,” Bunshichi answered.

“What!?” The young man finally noticed the presence behind him as he spoke. He side-stepped to the left, his face still locked on Bunshichi's. Once he had put a bit of distance between them, he turned away from Bunshichi and glanced back towards the path. The three men were standing there. The guy with sunglasses that he had stolen from and the other man had stepped into the clearing. The tallest of the three, Shimamura, was standing behind them.

“SHIT!” yelled the young man. He had those three men standing to the right of him, Bunshichi standing to the left and his back to the woods. There was a mass of tall dried tussock grass that stood between him and the forest. It would take a lot of time to try and escape through the trees. Bunshichi blocked him to the left, the young man had no idea what he was capable of, and the three men stood to his right. Even trying to make it to the tree line would be too much of a risk. He had hesitated for a moment and let his chance to escape slip away. The three men moved towards the center of the clearing.

“Hey kid,”

grumbled the man wearing sunglasses

“Looks like that guy was holding on to the wallet for you,” said the man standing next to him, turning his attention to Bunshichi. Shimamura stood behind the two men with his arms crossed, watching the situation unfold.

“He used me to hold on to it for him, it doesn't mean we are working together,” said Bunshichi.

“Huh,” the man wearing sunglasses said, his mouth only half open. He had propped his head forwards a little and his chin pointing straight out, “What do mean?”

“In all the confusion of the crowd, this kid jammed the wallet into my pocket.”

“...”

“We’re not working together” Bunshichi said softly. It was then that the young man spoke up out of nowhere.

“What are you talking about bro? You were the one that told me to do it!”

“What!?” the man in sunglasses said, string straight at Bunshichi.

“I only did it because he told me to! It’s a bit late now, but he told me to meet him here when it was over!”

Bunshichi looked bemused. The young man could really think on his feet. He seemed like the type that would try anything. He was dirty. Cunning. But his cunning and dirtiness were somehow invigorating.

"Must be time to break the two of you up, then," said the man in sunglasses. As he spoke a flash of golden light came from his hands. He was holding a hunting knife.

[023]

The young man took a sudden step back. The other man also pulled a knife from his pocket.

Shimamura was the only one not moving.

"Give that money back," said the man wearing sunglasses.

"Even if I do give it back now, you're not about to let this end peacefully, are you?" said the young man, putting the wallet into his pocket and slowly

moving backwards. Regardless of how much training one may have, light gleaming of a blade invokes human fear on a subconscious level. The young man was no exception. He took off his jacket and wrapped it around his fist as the two other men moved towards him. Fine beads of sweat started to form on the young man's brow. He still had that devilish grin on his face.

“You look like you’re about to piss yourself,” said the man wearing sunglasses. The young man lowered his posture and readied his heel. He parted his legs slightly and raised his fists in front of his face. It was similar to a boxing stance, but you probably couldn’t use it in an actual boxing match. His right hand was sticking out at the same level as his chin. His finger tips sat naturally, not balled into a fist. His left hand, with the jacket wrapped around it, was poised in the space between his right hand and his face, for protection.

His hands weren't sitting still either. They were moving around in the air as if waiting for an attack. His legs were also restless. His knees were moving, keeping in rhythm with his fists. While it might look like a self taught style, it seemed that he had some knowledge of Karate.



“You mind if I head home?” said Bunshichi. He was standing in the grass, not moving. He was like a thick wall of muscle.

“Not a chance,” Shimamura spoke up, “you’re going to face me.” A sharp light shone from the back of his narrow eyes as he spoke. He unfolded his arms and began walking towards Bunshichi. Then, as if someone had given a signal, the other two men closed in on the young man. The man in sunglasses made the first move. He lunged forward and thrust his knife out in front of himself. Much like the knife, the young man thrust his hand wrapped in his jacket and struck the man with sunglasses’ right hand. It was then that the other man held his knife at his waist and ran towards the young man.

“AH!” he said, using his jacket-wrapped hand to dodge the attack. The blade had managed to

puncture through the fabric of the jacket.

“Yaaaah!!” the young man cried out as he let fly a kick to the man's mid-section.

“This has got nothing to do with me,” said Bunshichi watching the young man move.

“It does now,” said Shimamura, putting black leather gloves on his hands as he walked towards Bunshichi. Once he had finished putting the gloves on, he was close enough to make an attack. He moved like a boxer. He made a straight right jab.

Bam.

[025]

The sound of muscle hitting muscle. Bunshichi shifted his weight to the left hand side of his body

and caught Shimamura's fist in the palm of his right hand. His palm was thick, like a cliff face. It was probably about double the thickness of a normal person's hand. And it was big. He caught the fist and began to squeeze it in his palm. Bunshichi then caught Shimamura's elbow in his left hand. A sharp 'crack' came from within Bunshichi's palm. It sounded like a dry branch being snapped in half. The sound stopped everyone in their tracks. It was a chilling kind of sound. The kind of sound that made your skin crawl.

Shimamura's piercing eyes became big and round. He turned his vision to the wrist of his right arm. His hand was no longer protruding from his wrist. It hadn't been torn off either. His hand had been bent all the way underneath his arm, leaving his wrist looking like a smooth round stump. His fingers were curled up at the tips. The palm of his hand was flat against the underside of his arm. It was grotesque. It looked like some kind of practical joke. But they soon understood that there

was nothing to laugh about when Shimamura started screaming.

“Gyaaah-!!” he sounded like a woman. He elongated the “aah” sound as the pitch of his voice rose. He kept screaming like that until there was no air left in his lungs. And then his voice was gone. His lungs were empty. The last of the sounds weren't screams of pain, but fear.

[026]

After the scream stopped and he sucked in another lung full of air, the true screams of pain began. They were the kind of unashamed screams you could never imagine coming from someone like Shimamura. He had been playing it so cool up until then. They weren't the cries of a human, they were

more like the cries of an animal.

“Nahgah!”, “Nugoh!” rang out, along with ‘Ugo’ and ‘Gogogo’. It was like he was trying to say something but he just couldn’t get the words out. It seemed a mix of natural shock, extreme pain and psychological damage. Shimamura fell to his knees and rolled over on the grass. He rolled over and over. You could see the whites of his eyes.

“What the hell did you do?” yelled the man in sunglasses.

“You-you-you...” the other man seemed like he wanted to say something, but was only able to make sounds like a chicken.

“Go home,” said Bunshichi. But the other two men didn’t quite seem to understand. The young man turned and looked at Shimamura, his mouth half agape. The man in sunglasses, still clutching his

knife, cleared his throat a little. The other man's shoulders were moving up and down in time with his deep breaths.

[027]

“Just leave,” said Bunshichi, as he took a step forward. The other two began to move towards him as if sucked in by his movements.

The fight was over in an instant. Bunshichi's cliff like right fist flew out and struck the man in sunglasses on his left cheek. The man in sunglasses went flying backwards. As he pulled his right fist back, he pushed his right elbow forward. His elbow struck the other man's face and sent him flying in the opposite direction. They fell back into the grass. The sharp blades of dry grass were

probably scratching their faces or their open eye balls, but they wouldn't have noticed, they were completely unconscious. Bunshichi had knocked their consciousness right out of their bodies. The man wearing sunglasses was lying face-up on the grass. His glasses had flown so far you couldn't see them anymore. The two of them were still clutching their knives.

The young man was looking at Bunshichi with a look of awe. He was trembling with fear. Bunshichi cast his sleepy gaze over to the young man.

“Hey,” Bunshichi called out, un-ballng his fists, “good thing we didn’t fight, huh?” he said in a low voice as he turned his back to the young man. He turned towards the path and started walking. The young man didn’t move, he just stared at Bunshichi’s back. No, it was more than he *couldn’t* move.

“That...,” the young man started, pausing slightly as if unable to get the words out, “was amazing” he muttered to himself, clearly impressed.

“Simply amazing! Incredible! You!” his voice became so loud you would think he was using a megaphone. He started to run after Bunshichi.

[028]

Chapter II

Light shone on the surface of the water. It was coming from the street lights and a nearby hotel. It was dusk. The wind was calm and the color of the moon tinged of the surface of the lake. There was

still a little light in the sky to the west. The clear blue sky was turning to a deep shade of purple. The sun was setting and with it the light was leaving. The moon sat large and bright in the sky to the east. There were one or two stars in the sky. There was no wind on land, but there was some higher in the sky and it was making the stars twinkle.

Lake Sarusawa. It was surrounded by hotels and lodges. There wasn't much left of the traditional Japanese town that once stood there. People who visited as children probably wouldn't recognize it if they came back today. It was nothing but a popular tourist spot now. Bunshichi Tanba was standing on the shore of that lake, watching the light dance on the water. He had his hands firmly in his pockets. He had been staring out over the lake for about half an hour. The town was light when he arrived, but it was now sinking into darkness. It was clearly changing from dusk to night.

To his right, on a hillside path under Kofuku Temple, tourists were walking around peeking at the houses for sale. There were a lot of people coming down the path to Sarusawa and they were casting shadows on to the surface of the water. The young man from before was standing a few meters away from Bunshichi. He had been following Bunshichi for almost four hours. The young man had been trying to talk to Bunshichi the whole time. Bunshichi had ignored him, but that didn't stop the young man from following him.

“How long are you planning on following me?” said Bunshichi, his gaze still fixed on the reflections in the water. The young man lifted his head. He had his hands in his pockets, of course. His jacket had a cut-mark on the upper left shoulder. The young man took his hands out of his pockets and took a step towards Bunshichi.

He had a shallow stab wound on his left wrist. It was from when he wrapped his jacket around it and the guy wearing sunglasses came at him with a knife. That's also where the tear on the shoulder of his jacket came from.

“At last he speaks!” said the young man, still around three meters away from Bunshichi.

“How how much longer are you going to follow me around?” Bunshichi asked in a low voice.

“How long...?”

“I haven't got any money. If that's what you needed I would have given it to you.”

“Bro, I can tell if people have money just by looking at them.”

“What about me?”

“Do you think that I thought you had any money, bro?” said the young man, his voice showing no fear.

[030]

A small, wry grin began to form on Bunshichi's thick lips.

“Probably not.”

“That's right.”

“So go bother someone else.”

“Why?”

“...” Bunshichi didn't answer.

“Make me your student.”

“Student?” without thinking Bunshichi turned and looked at the young man. He never thought the words “student” would ever come out of his mouth.

“You’re learning Karate or something right? Well, teach me that.”

“Teach you?”

“Yeah, this kind of stuff,” the young man said before balling his hand up into a tight fist and thrusting it in front of himself. It was a pretty good punch in its own kind of way. He had welts on his fists from over-training.

“You seem to know a little bit already.”

“Well, yeah,” said the young man, nodding his head.

“So keep doing it and get stronger.”

“Nah, it's hopeless, that damn Dojo...”

“...” Bunshichi kept listening.

“All they ever do is boast about how awesome they are. There are so many rules and they don't let us do anything. They are always wasting time with their bullshit.”

“Huh.”

“They are so stuck up they would probably turn you away if you challenged them without even throwing a single punch.”

“Challenge them...” Bunshichi muttered, “...people still do that.”

“Yeah, they do. I'm not saying you should take the Dojo on by yourself, but at least just go and ask to observe. Go in looking like you wouldn't hurt a fly. But of course have no intention of just observing the class and going straight home. At some point you ask them that you want them to teach you something...”

“Hmm...”

“It never happens when the seniors are there, but once someone did it when the seniors were gone, and I took them on.”

“...”
...

“We really went at it. Me and him. I think he was a university student. Naturally he was a little more skilled than me. But fights really boil down courage. I was worse than him, but I managed to give him a few surprises. I didn't care about getting

hit. I wanted him to hit me. I only hit him once for every three times he hit me. But even then I didn't tap out. My style wasn't half bad either. We were exchanging blows, getting splattered in blood when our instructor came back and started giving us a lecture."

"..."

"The Dojo is for training, not for fighting.',
'Follow the rules'."

"Rules?"

"There is no rule that says we have to hold back," Ryoji grumbled.

Normally in a Karate match, each fighter tries to avoid hitting their opponent with their fists and feet. This means that one stops their attack when they are on the verge of making a hit to the body. The judges watch this and award victories and

losses accordingly. It's a special rule that was implemented as Karate attacks can be very dangerous. This is what the young man is talking about when he says 'holding back'.

In other martial arts, like boxing or fencing, attacks are allowed to hit your opponents body.

[032]

However martial arts equipment, like padding, bamboo swords and ropes are used to lessen the impact the attacks have on the body.

“Full contact Karate is getting more popular,” said Bunshichi.

“Yeah, that's true.”

“Why don't you just train at a full contact Karate

Dojo?"

"..." the young man fell silent.

"Just give it a go," said Bunshichi.

"You've got to be kidding."

"....."

"It's pain in the ass, I'll have to take my student ID, get permission from my parents, they'll ask me where I live and all that. I'm sure they will let me have a full contact match, but they won't let me have a real fight."

"You're not from around here, are you?" Bunshichi asked. The young man spoke with an unmistakable Kanto accent and they were in the Kansai region.

He spoke like an adult, but was still a bit childish, which made Bunshichi smile a little. He looked up into the night sky. It had gotten completely dark. A cold breeze began to blow through. Bunshichi took a step away. The young man followed. He walked away from the bank of the lake and into the bustling business which surrounded it. He was headed in the direction of Nara station. Bunshichi talked back over his shoulder, somehow aware that he was being followed.

“Why do you want to be my student?”

“Because you're strong,” the young man replied to Bunshichi's massive back.

“I may be strong...” Bunshichi shot back. He wasn't worked up or anything, he just spoke those words as if they were a matter of fact, “but there are plenty of people who are stronger than me.”

“Bullshit there are.”

“It's true.”

“Yeah, but you laid those thugs out in no time flat, didn't you?”

“One of them had some experience with boxing. But I guess he was just an amateur after all. It took way too long.”

“No, I mean, I just said you laid them out. But it's not that it took too long or was too quick. Although that is a thing as well. But that's not what I'm trying to say.”

“What are you trying to say?”

“Bro, you're not just strong.”

“I'm...?”

“You’re serious. You take this stuff seriously.”

“I’m serious?”

[034]

“That’s what makes you strong. You took out three street thugs one by one. That was you wasn’t it?”

“Yeah.”

“Yeah, it was mesmerizing.”

“It’s a good idea to get serious when people are coming at you with knives.” A bitter smile flashed across Bunshichi’s face as he spoke. He looked like he had just remembered something. “But I was taking it easy on them.”

“...”

“You couldn’t tell?” Bunshichi asked. The young

man knew exactly what Bunshichi was saying, but it looked like he was having trouble comprehending what he was really trying to say. The young man fell silent for a second before speaking.

“So you're telling me,” the young man started, now standing to the left of Bunshichi, “That you *went easy on them* so as not beat them to death, but *didn't hold back* so as to give them a thrashing?”

“More or less.” Bunshichi said quietly. The young man somehow seemed to understand what Bunshichi was trying to tell him. “You know, for better or worse, thieves are nothing but trouble.”

“ ”
...

“Nothing decent can come from hanging around a kid who stole money from some guys who were clearly gang members.”

“Dude, you knew I slipped the money into your pocket and you were going to run off with it.”

“I wasn't really going to steal it, but what you stuffed into my pocket was not the kind of thing I could hand in to the lost and found, either.”

“Stealing or not, you were going to make that money your own.”

[035]

“Well, a every thief has to take their cut.”

“Shit...” the young man said, spitting on the ground. The spit fell on the asphalt just in front of a woman in jeans who was walking towards him, causing her to wince and pull away.

“What did you do with the money?” Bunshichi asked.

“I left it there.”

“Why?”

“It's well and good to swipe cash from some guys who are acting tough, but you can't take money from a bunch of guys lying face down on the ground.”

“You're not as nasty as you look,” said Bunshichi.

The young man let out a chuckle as he nodded his head and grinned.

“What is it?”

“This...” said the young man as he pulled something out of his jacket pocket. There was a small bundle of 10,000 yen notes wedged between his fingertips.

“You took some as well...” said Bunshichi.

“What do you mean *as well*? Did you....”

“Just a little bit,” Bunshichi said as he puled his bulky hand from his jacket pocket. He too had a bundle of notes between his fingers. It was more than the young man had taken.

“You're even worse than me,” said the young man.

“It's because they came at me with a knife, even though I was just a bystander.”

“Wait, wouldn't you have had to pocket the cash *before* they came at you with knives?”

“I don't seem to remember,” said Bunshichi, pretending to not know the answer.

“You're a dog after all.”

“Is that bad?”

[036]

“Oh, it's bad.”

“I didn't really have a choice.”

“...”
...

“I need to get myself a decent meal and get a good night sleep for tomorrow. This cash is for expenses. If I ever run into those guys again, and I do happen to have some cash on hand, I can pay them back,” the way Bunshichi spoke made it difficult to tell if he was serious or just joking. He was hard man to read. His eyes were staring off into the distance.

Chapter III

It was still dark when Bunshichi woke up, but not the middle of the night. Dawn was approaching. Dull light flowed through the window, illuminating the room with a soft white glow. He sat bolt upright in his bed, naked from the waist up. He sprang up with the force of raw rubber. His body wasn't disproportionately brawny like a bodybuilder. It was more like he had thick bones with fat muscle wrapped around them. His muscles weren't lumped on to his body, but it was more like his skin clung tightly to his flesh. His chest and abdomen were about the same width, but there was no sagging in the slightest. The thickness of his neck put it in a class of its own. It was not easily noticeable when he was wearing a shirt, but it was really something. It was almost thicker and stuck out further than his head.

Bunshichi unloaded himself from the bed, causing the springs to make a creaking as if the mattress was about to give way. The floor boards took the weight of his body without making a sound. All he had on was a pair of briefs.

[037]

Bunshichi had scars running all over his chest. Some were old, others fresh. Some of the scars were obviously made by blades, while others were unmistakably burn marks. He had two large scars, one on his abdomen and another on his back. The one on his back was a single mark that stretched from his right shoulder over to the armpit on the other side in a straight line. It looked like someone had slashed his back with a samurai sword. The scar on his abdomen was even more unusual. It was as if someone had tried to gouge out the left side of his navel. But even though it looked like a gouge mark, that didn't mean that sticking out by a

few centimeters. The skin had been pulled and turned. It's the kind of scar that a blade would leave if it had punctured his flesh and been twisted in place.

The young man was asleep on the other bed next to him. Ryoji Kubori. That was his name. Last night after he and Ryoji had gotten a bite eat, they got their things from the coin locker at the train station and booked a room at the hotel. Bunshichi pulled a pair of black sweat pants and a sweat shirt from his bag that lay on the floor. He put them on slowly. They were pretty worn out. They appeared to be more ash colored than pure black, but that depended on which angle you looked at them from. His clothes were covered in stains. They looked like blood stains, though it was difficult to tell how old they were. His arms and legs were like logs, but when they were hidden by his clothing it was only his neck that stood out. You could see the line from his neck to the bottoms of his ears as his hair was so short.

He put his socks on. He simply pulled them over his feet not caring if they were the right way around or not. He pulled out his sneakers and slipped them over his feet.

[038]

He slowly tied his laces. Ryoji awoke as he tied them.

“What the...” Ryoji mumbled, his voice still hoarse from having just woken up. His hair was a mess.

“You're awake,” said Bunshichi. Ryoji sat upright in bed. He was also naked from the waist up. He was bit thinner than Bunshichi, but his upper body muscles were still well defined. The skin on his body was as smooth as his face. His body was supple, as if hiding strong natural reflexes.

“Where are you going at this hour of the morning?”

“There's no such thing as heaven, is there?”

Bunshichi replied as he tied his laces. He wasn't looking at Ryoji.

“What...?” said Ryoji as he pulled himself up and sat on the edge of the bed.

“But there probably is a hell,” he said as he finished tightening his laces.

“Hold up...” said Ryoji as Bunshichi silently put the shirt and pants he had changed out of the night before and thrown on the floor into his travel bag. Ryoji scrambled to get dressed. He had just managed to ram his feet into his shoes by the time Bunshichi had his hand on the door knob. Ryoji didn't have any luggage.

“So, where are you going?” asked Ryoji as he ran

his fingers through his hair like a comb. Bunshichi didn't say anything. They went to reception, handed back the key and paid the bill. It was Bunshichi who paid.

[039]

"That's cold, man. If I hadn't have woken up when I did, you would have just left me there," Ryoji said to Bunshichi's back as he walked. Bunshichi didn't reply. They exited the hotel.

"Hey man..." Ryoji started. Bunshichi turned and threw his bag at him. Ryoji caught it against his chest.

"Stop talking so much," he said to Ryoji in a quiet voice. His expression hadn't changed from the day before, but it was almost like it was a different personality was coming out from inside of him.

"B-" Ryoji was about to open with 'bro' but his

lips froze in place. There was a kind of intensity coming from Bunshichi which stopped him before he could muster single word. Bunshichi bent his shoulders and knees in front of the hotel. He was stretching. Bending over and touching the asphalt with the tips of his fingers and rotating his ankles. He rotated his neck as well. He twisted his entire body and reached over his back. It was like he was warming up for something. Bunshichi's huge body suddenly started moving across the asphalt. It was a rhythmical movement that hid the weight of his huge body. Ryoji followed after him, still clutching the travel bag.

Bunshichi was jogging in the direction of Nara park. He slowly increased his pace as he pushed forward. His shoulders leisurely moved up and down. Ryoji also increased his pace. Eventually Ryoji was unable to keep up with Bunshichi as he was carrying his luggage.

“Shit! God damn...”

Ryoji yelled out as he followed after Bunshichi, still holding on to his bag.

The sun had yet to rise over the asphalt roads. The streets of Nara lay silent. Bunshichi passed by lake Sarusawa and into Nara park. He took the path on the left hand side towards lake Washi and passed the front of the Kasuga Shrine. It was a roundabout course; the long way. Bunshichi finally came to a stop in front of the Manyo Botanical Gardens. Before Ryoji, who was now about 100 meters behind, could voice his dissatisfaction, Bunshichi began some light stretching. His stretching movements focused primarily on his wrists and the joints around his neck. He bent backwards to a surprising degree. He took on a Sumo wrestler's pose, that is to say that he stretched his legs out, spread them apart and crouched down so far that his inner thighs were almost touching the ground.

Then Bunshichi let his upper body fall forwards. His chest and abdomen lay flat on the ground. His forehead was touching the dirt. His body was as supple as a gymnast. Next he started doing push ups, but they were not your usual push ups. He put his hands on the ground, palm open, and effortlessly did fifty push ups. But he wasn't finished. He then switched from palm to fingertips and did another 10 push ups. Then he curled his pinky fingers up and did another 10 push ups on only eight fingers. Every 10 push ups after that, he curled another finger into the palm of each hand. He did the last 10 push ups with his thumbs alone. One hundred push ups in all. That was one set. Bunshichi then moved on to the second set all while keeping a steady rhythm.

It was then that fine beads of sweat finally began shimmer on Bunshichi's brow. His breathing however remained normal. He stood up and wiped the dirt from palms. For a moment it looked like Bunshichi's entire body had increased in size. It was as if steam was rising from his body into the early morning air. Morning mist had sunk through the trees and into the depths of the forest in Nara Park. Deer could be seen moving around.

Bunshichi stopped and carefully stretched once again. He rolled his neck a few times before finally standing still. He took a deep breath and settled himself down on a nearby bench. He closed his eyes and caught his breath. It didn't look like the type of scene Ryoji would want to interrupt. There was some kind of tingling sensation that seemed to radiate from Bunshichi's body. After a short while, Bunshichi stood back up. He opened his eyes.

“Bro...” It was Ryoji. Bunshichi ignored him and started walking in the other direction. He stopped

in front of an pine tree, dropped his sweat pants and took a piss. It took a while to get it all out. It caused a thick steam to rise into the air. Bunshichi finished and turned his head upwards. There was sunlight coming up from behind the tips of the trees.

“Let's get moving,” he said.

Chapter IV

They went down the same woodland path as the day before.

[042]

Bunshichi was walking ahead and Ryoji was trailing behind, Bunshichi's bag still in his arms.

The mist had set in on to the tall withered grass that hung from either side of the path. Bunshichi's sweat pants and Ryoji's jeans were damp from the knee down. They came to a clearing. It was the same one where Bunshichi had taken down those three thugs the day before. Naturally they were no longer there. Instead there were two men standing under the cherry blossom tree. One of them looked to be in his forties while the other was a lot younger. Bunshichi stopped once he had laid eyes on them. He felt a strong force flex within himself. He lowered his head slightly and gave them a nod. The older man returned the gesture. The younger man did not. He simply gave Bunshichi and icy stare.

The younger man was quite tall. He looked even taller than Bunshichi, although he probably didn't weigh as much. His shoulders were not very broad and he had slit eyes. His skin was pale. He was looking at Bunshichi through his half closed, Buddha-like eyes. He looked to be around 25 or 26

years old. He was the kind of guy who could be mistaken for a woman at first glance. His hair was long. His smooth, sleek locks hung down to his shoulders. He was wearing a black suit. The blackness of his clothes made his white skin stand out even more. He turned his cold, glassy eyes to Bunshichi.

The older man was a little more stumpy. He was short compared to both Bunshichi and the younger man standing next to him, but he still would have stood about 5 feet 7 inches. He looked like a boulder who had been rolled over dead grass.

[043]

His hairline was starting to recede. He looked like the human form of the lion statues that guard Shinto shrines. He was calm. He had black traditional Japanese leggings on under his Karate uniform.

The wind came in from the left of them, lashing at the brittle long grass.

“Souichiro Izumi?” asked Bunshichi.

“That's me,” the older man replied in a low voice.

“I'm Bunshichi Tanba,” said Bunshichi. There was a short silence.

“Who are you?” he asked the younger man.

“Tsutomu Himekawa,” the answer came from Souichiro. The young, long haired man acknowledged Bunchishi for the first time with his eyes.

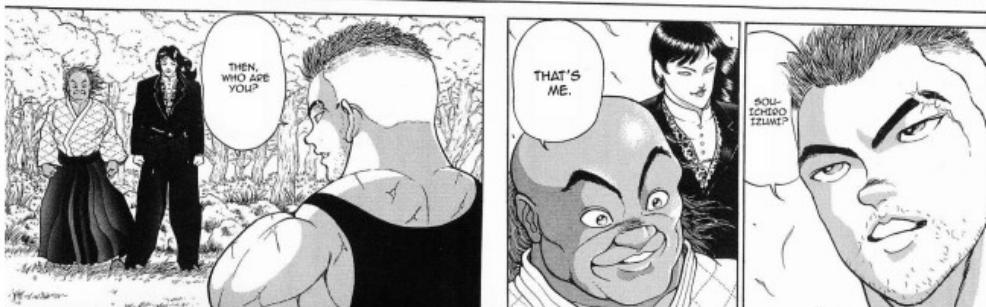
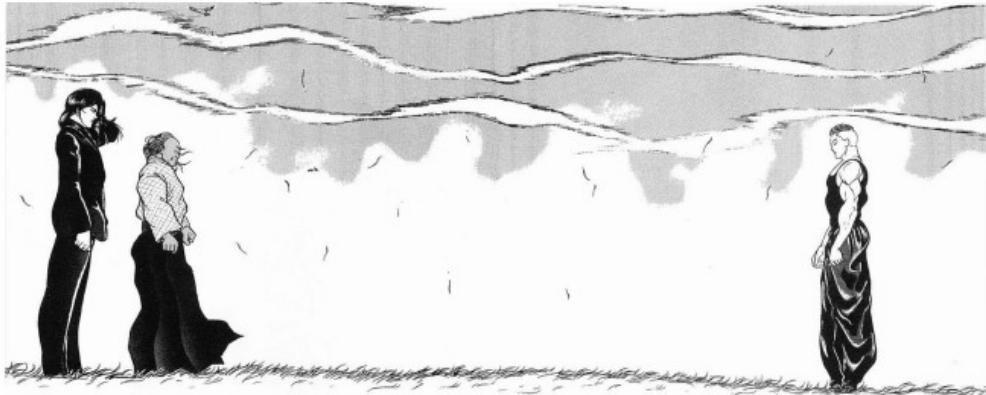
“He's a fourth-dan at the Hokushinkan. He has been staying with me as a guest. I brought him along as a contender,” said Tsutomu.

“The Hokushinkan, huh.”

“He has been studying under Mr. Shozan Matsuo. I'm sure you are familiar with Mr. Matsuo.”

Bunshichi gave him a nod. The Hokushinkan is an organization that operates outside of the Japanese Karate Federation. They disapprove of holding back and stopping attacks before they hit, and actually try to strike their opponents with their punches and kicks. The only attacks that were forbidden were attacks to the eyes and groin, as well as direct punches to the head. The founder, Mr. Matsuo, spent his life forming the organization, which practices practical Karate. It has branches not only in Japan, but all over the world. They really *hit hard* during training.

“I heard that you trained in the Takemiya Style along with Mr. Matsuo,”



[044]

Said Bunshichi. The Takemiya style, like the Araki style, was born from the Yagyu-shinkage style of

martial arts. It is a little known style of martial arts which emerged from the Yagyu-shinkage school. It uses bare knuckle fighting and weapons to try and defeat your opponent. It is probably closer to Jujitsu than it is to Karate. There is a large focus on throws and grappling at the joints, not only striking opponents with your fists. It is said that this style was created by a master who appeared in the middle of the Edo period by the name of Hikojiro Izumi. According to records, Hikojiro was able to defeat bulls and bears with his bare hands. The man standing in front of him, Souichiro Izumi, was the one who had inherited the task of keeping the Takemiya style alive.

“Thank you for accepting my challenge,” Bunshichi said.

“I couldn't call myself a martial artist if I didn't accept when challenged,” Souichiro replied. He was looking straight at Bunshichi. “I've heard a lot rumors about you,” he continued.

“No kidding.”

“Yeah, I heard that you fight dirty.”

“Really?” said Bunshichi as he slowly moved his body forward. He didn't move straight forward, but diagonally to the right, stepping over the long dry grass. Souichiro leisurely let his arms fall to his sides as he followed Bunshichi's movements with his eyes.

“We really *hit hard*,” said Souichiro under his breath. That line was meant as a promise.

[045]

It meant that he didn't want Bunshichi to hold back. He wanted him to really try to land his hits. He didn't want it to be a 'match' where fighters stop their attacks short of making contact, but a real test to see who was the better fighter. Bunshichi

stopped in his tracks. They were twice as close now as they were when they had first faced each other. You could feel the nerves radiating from them in the morning air.

“When shall we start?” asked Bunshichi.

“We already have,” answered Souichiro. He calmly shifted his weight on the grass as he spoke.

WE
ALREADY HAVE
...

WHEN
SHALL WE
START?

Chapter V

Bunshichi thought that the match would be over in an instant. People experienced in full contact fights are strong. It's only through real fights that one comes to know how much damage your body can take, and how much damage a hit is going to do once it connects. Even in a fight between two people who practice the same style of martial arts, the one with experience outside of a Dojo has the advantage. They are able to take a hit. That being said, the man now standing in front of Bunshichi, Souichiro, was not some heir to a Dojo who had never fought outside of one. No, they were birds of a feather. Whether or not he was on the same level as Bunshichi, he certainly looked as if he had

plenty of experience with full contact fighting. He also looked like he had been through more than a few fights that almost cost someone their life.

It was Souichiro that had taken on Bunshichi's challenge and nominated Nara park as the place to fight. Duels were currently banned. Only sparring and competition matches was allowed. Dueling could possibly lead to legal action. The fact that Souichiro had chosen this park as the place to fight, and not a Dojo, meant that he never intended for it to be a competition match and he mentally prepared himself accordingly. This is the conclusion he had come to after hearing all the rumors about Bunshichi. Normally he would run away. Avoid the fight. That much was expected. Most of the experienced martial artists who had been challenged by Bunshichi had done so. However it wasn't actually Souichiro who had accepted Bunshichi's challenge. One of the other students had accepted, but Souichiro was standing in for him. Everyone who had accepted up until

now had been beaten to a pulp by Bunshichi. They had no choice but to use a stand-in.

Bunshichi had nothing to lose. Even if he did, it was just his life that he would forfeit. If it was a schools honor that was at stake, then it could cost people their livelihoods. They wouldn't accept a duel in that case, even if they thought they could win. But he had accepted. He *did* think he could win.

[047]

Souichiro wouldn't have accepted if he thought he would lose. He would have plenty of reasons to run. If he had ignored the challenge completely, that would have been the end of it. But he accepted. He accepted because the thought he could win. He had the kind of confidence that came from experience.

The master of full contact Karate, Shozan Matsuo,

had invited Souichiro's father, Jusuke Izumi to be his student. Jusuke had learned techniques from Shozan that primarily focused on constricting joints. Shozan Matsuo took the joint focused techniques from the Takemiya style of Karate and added them to his own Kitatatsu Style. Souichiro Izumi and Shozan Matsuo were connected through this fork in the evolution of Karate. Jusuke was no longer of this world. Now his son, Souichiro, is continuing on where he left off.

Souichiro and Bunshichi were now facing one another. They were fighting to try and critically injure each other. The winner would be the one who lands the first direct hit to the others body. They could gouge an eye or snap a joint. The fight could be decided by a single finger. For example, if one were to strike the other without critically injuring them, the other could grapple them by the joints of their body and the fight would be over. Depending on how you look at it, you could say that grappling is the most formidable fighting style.

You could especially say it about one-on-one bare knuckle fights. You come to understand that in the instant the fight is over, regardless of what fighting style you use.

This wasn't the kind of fight where you would be asked if you want to tap out once your opponent has you in a hold. Once held, your arms, legs and knees would be broken. You would be asked if you wanted to tap out once your limbs had stopped working. Killing, or being left for dead came after that.

[048]

That was the kind of fight that Bunshichi now faced. That's what Bunshichi would do if it were him. Bunshichi began to taste his own fear of grappling so much that it made him sick. He had known that unbearable pain. He felt that pain all over again as he watched Souichiro move towards

him over the dry, dead grass. The fear sat in the pit of his stomach and licked at his insides like the forked tongue of a snake. It was fear from being grappled to the ground by a man six years ago. It was the taste of defeat and humiliation. Bunshichi's fear, however, didn't do anything to diminish his determination. Rather, remembering that defeat and humiliation lit a dark flame inside of himself.

Souichiro had yet to take on a fighting stance as he stepped through the withered grass. He was coming towards Bunshichi from an angle. He had Japanese style socks on over his feet. Bunshichi was also yet to take a fighting stance. Neither of them had begun to close the distance between them. *As far as I can tell...* Bunshichi began to think. No, not really think, rather instinctively feel. He was still a fair distance away. *As far as I can tell, Souichiro will try to make his final move by grappling me to the ground.* The distance needed to grapple was smaller than the distance needed to land a couple of punches.

But Souichiro probably wouldn't make his first attack a grappling move. Firstly, after some offense and defense with his arms and legs, he would most likely look for an opening and then come in for a grappling attack. But even against the initial offense and defense with arms and legs, Bunshichi had a greater reach. Having a bigger body size in a bare knuckle fight plays an important factor in deciding who will win.

[049]

But that wasn't the the deciding factor either. The slight advantage of having a larger body could be gone in an instant if you let your guard down. This is especially true in serious fights. You should think about how to effective use your fists to strike your opponent before they hit you. No, not even think about it. Thoughts like that become a part of your body. They become instinct.

Bunshichi began to move. He moved to the side, keeping the same pace as his opponent. He couldn't move as freely as he normally could due to the long dry grass coming up to his knees. That meant that he was unable to judge the levelness of the ground beneath his feet. The distance between the two was quickly shrinking. They had both lowered their backs a little as they moved. Himekawa silently watched the two of them. Ryoji stood with his legs slightly ajar, clutching Bunshichi's bag with both arms. His arms were tense.

"Bro," Ryoji called out. Souichiro moved in towards Bunshichi as soon as the words had left his mouth. Just as he moved in, Bunshichi made a move. His right leg flew upwards. His tree trunk like leg roared through the air, the sole of his foot striking Souichiro's chest like a spear. Souichiro took the hit with his bent left elbow. Souichiro then grabbed Bunshichi's ankle with the same hand as he took the blow. He grabbed the underside of

Bunshichi's left knee with his left hand. He then got into position to pull off a deciding grappling move using the knee and ankle.

It is commonly said that there are around two or three thousand different grappling moves.

[050]

There are attacks for every joint in the human body, that can be made from every part of the attackers body. The number of grappling moves you could do using only the wrist are in the double digits. And that number could easily double simply by grappling another part of the body at the same time. And once you have your hands in place, there is any number of moves you could make.

Every type of martial art, be it Aikido, Jujitsu, Karate or Kung Fu, includes grappling. Even the Sambo style of martial arts from Russia has developed it's own unique methods of grappling. It

isn't possible for a single human being to be proficient in every kind of grappling there is. Bunshichi only had a working knowledge of how to use and execute grappling techniques from the Takemiya style of karate. And that was from copying techniques he had only read about in books or heard about from others. He hadn't even been taught that well by the people at his school of Karate. He simply had to take a guess based on his own grappling techniques, as well as others he had seen and heard about. It is also not unusual for secret grappling techniques to not be written down. There are countless techniques that are passed down directly from teacher to student.

Even though it's called grappling, that doesn't mean that you should suddenly try to make a finishing move by twisting and holding down your opponents body. You have to use a strict pattern of attack. Although most attack patterns have the same finishing move, they differ depending on the style of grappling. The most frightening opponents are

the ones whose moves you can't read. You have to do something before you begin a pattern of attack.

Bunshichi kicked the at the ground with his left ankle. Dirt flew up and hit Souichiro, who still had Bunshichi by the leg. This caused Souichiro to lose his grip on Bunshichi.

[051]

Bunshichi turned his foot to the side and twisted his upper body to the right. This action jerked Bunshichi's leg free from Souichiro's grip.

Bunshichi then put his left hand on the dry grass and fell down to the ground. His left foot hit the ground after his hand. Souichiro began to move before Bunshichi's right foot hit the ground.

Souichiro went to kick Bunshichi in the stomach just as he was about to get back up. Souichiro's' foot flew into the empty space between Bunshichi's stomach and the ground, but he jerked it back up like a snake jerking it's body away, sensing

something about to go wrong.

Bunshichi again twisted his body half way around to the side. Souichiro's snake-like foot grazed past Bunshichi's torso on it's way up. Bunshichi rolled away over the grass. He made three complete revolutions and stopped upright on his knees. Souichiro's leg came in for an attack on Bunshichi's head just as he looked up. Bunshichi bent his left elbow and used it to absorb the attack. It had the same impact of someone striking as hard as they could with a wooden club. It was a piercing kind of attack that his bulky frame wasn't used to. Any normal person would be taken back by such an attack, wind up hitting themselves in the forehead with their own arm or having the bone of the elbow broken. But Bunshichi was able to absorb that power with his left elbow.

He then stood up. The attacks were immediate.
Fist.
Fist.

Elbow.

Foot.

Elbow.

Finger.

Fist.

Bunshichi managed to repel all of Souichiro's' attacks. He absorbed the blows with his elbows and knees, used his wrists to deflect others and his palms to push the rest aside.



[052]

However there was no time for him to form attacks of his own. If his attacks were anything short of perfect, he would instantly find himself in a grappling hold. Souichiro's attacks were impressive. You would never have guessed he was in his forties. Around the upper body he went for the manubrium, the sternum, the liver and the suture. Around the head he aimed for the temple, the philtrum, the mandible and the clavicle. They were swift attacks, perfectly aimed at the vital points of the body. Letting any of them connect would lead to a direct hit, and Bunshichi would most likely pass out from pain in no time flat.

Souichiro was as precise as a robot. There wasn't a single attack that was not made at full force.

Bunshichi soon realized what he was up against. He still couldn't get into the rhythm of Souichiro's movements. He had been very light on his feet since the beginning. That's what Bunshichi was thinking about as he blocked all of Souichiro's attacks. He was the kind of man that wanted to use all the fighting moves he had been taught and bring his black blood to a boil while doing so. The type of human who thought he could utterly defeat his opponent with his sheer number of attacks.

Bunshichi smelt the stench that only a person who had learned ways of killing a man with his bare hands could make. Bunshichi knew it. He could smell his own kind. He just knew it. A sensation of excitement tingled swiftly up his spine. He couldn't help but let a smile form on his fat lips

Bunshichi could see the same kind of joy twinkling in the eye of his opponent. Souichiro's attacks weakened slightly, just for a moment. Bunshichi wasn't about to just let that opportunity pass by. He decided to make a kicking attack to try and throw off his Souichiro's rhythm. That was when it happened. The only thing Bunshichi saw was the back of Souichiro's head. That was the moment. The movement of kicking with his left leg started in Bunshichi's muscles. There was the quick movement of something coming up from beneath him with inhuman speed, as if it had predicted his attack. It was the left heel of Souichiro, who had turned his back on Bunshichi and lent forward. His heel was about to wedge itself into the gap between Bunshichi's thighs.

A heel-kick between the legs is enough to crush ones testicles and have them pass out from the pain. If unlucky, it could lead to death. Even if it didn't kill you, it would shatter your pubic bones.

“Nuuuh”

Whether it was a cry of fear, or the cry of an attack, Bunshichi himself didn't even know. Bunshichi thrust his hand straight down in the direction of his crotch. His hand met Souichiro's heel between his legs. There came a sharp sound. The two attacks canceled each other out. If Bunshichi didn't have the body weight that he had, there is no mistaking that Souichiro's heel would have pushed straight past his hand and crushed his testicles, if the sheer speed of the attack didn't kill him outright. This was a chance to win. Bunshichi jumped up above Souichiro, who was still bent over in the opposite direction. He put all of his weight behind his right elbow and came down on Souichiro's spine.

[054]

“Gyaaa!” Souichiro groaned as he spat out some

phlegm. Their bodies sunk into the grass, one on top of the other. Bunshichi's left arm was wrapped around Souichiro's face, trying to force it to the right hand side. Bunshichi's thick arm covered most of Souichiro's face, from his right cheek to his chin. From there he pulled Souichiro's half turned head up towards his chest. Souichiro's spine and neck were bent all the way back. Souichiro tried to scream, but the voice was unable to pass his lips. Bunshichi had his left arm under Souichiro's armpit and left hand, from the outside. The hand of his left arm was spread out from Souichiro's armpit to his collar bone. His fingers were intertwined with those of Souichiro's left hand, which was wrapped around his face.

Just then there was a tearing sound. The sound came from Souichiro's shoulder which was wrapped in the muscle of Bunshichi's arms. It was like the sound a chicken wing makes when you take either part of the wing in each hand and pull them opposite directions, ripping it apart at the joint.

“*Guuuh*,” a muffled sound managed to pass through Souichiro's lips. The extreme pain pushed through the obstruction of his throat. Souichiro was losing his ability to move. Bunshichi got up off of Souichiro and took a step back. He took a deep breath. And that's when it happened. Souichiro's body, which should have been limp and lifeless, sprung forth from the long grass. With his left arm hanging loosely at his side. He made a 'V' shape with the middle and index fingers of his right hand and lunged towards Bunshichi's face.

[055]

He was aiming for Bunshichi's nose. If he managed to land the 'V' of his fingers on to Bunshichi's nose, they would slide up and hit his eyeballs. If he got his fingers in there, it would be direct, single strike attack, and Bunshichi wouldn't be able to turn his head away.

Bunshichi jerked his head to the side a split second before impact, and landed a heavy punch on Souichiro's unguarded left cheek with his right fist. Souichiro was knocked over, but he got straight back up. He looked back at Bunshichi and spat out a mouth full of blood and chipped teeth. His blood soaked Bushichi's sweat pants an even darker shade and the tooth chips lay grainy against the cloth. Souichiro wasn't ready to give up.

Bunshichi gave Souichiro another blow from his heavy fist. Souichiro was again thrown backwards, and again tried to get back up. Bunshichi drove the heel of his left sneaker into Souichiro's chest as he tried to get back up. The sound of cracking bone could be heard. Souichiro tried to get up again, but again Bunshichi drove his heel into the same place. Again there was the sound of cracking ribs. Souichiro finally stopped moving. His red mouth opened and his eyes gazed up towards the sky. He had been a decent challenge.

Bunshichi's body was shaking a little. Not even he knew how or why he was shaking. He took a deep breath and took a few steps back. He felt like they had been fighting for a half hour, but it would have been around five minutes at the most. Bunshichi looked up.

[056]

Tsutomu Himekawa stood under the cherry blossom tree. His expression hadn't changed from before. His eyes were like ice. A wry smile had formed on his lips. He slowly walked over to where Souichiro was lying face up on the ground. He bent down and took a look at him.

"He'll be OK. I didn't do enough damage to kill him," said Bunshichi as he watched Souichiro slowly stand back up on the grass. The cuff of his black leggings were blowing in the wind and rustling against the long dry grass. He looked at Bunshichi through his squinty eyes.

“You wanna try again?” Bunshichi asked in a low voice.

“No, he doesn't,” Himekawa quietly answered back. It seemed that it didn't really matter to this long haired man if Souichiro had lost on behalf of his school.

“That was a terrific match,” said Himekawa, turning his glassy eyes towards Bunshichi.

“.....”

“May I ask you something?”

“Sure.”

“What was that move you used with the headlock around his neck and left arm?”

“Oh, that...”

“I had never seen it before.”

“It's called the Chicken Wing Face Lock or something.”

“Chicken... Wing...”

“Face Lock,” said Bunshichi, finishing the sentence off for him.

“Interesting...”

“Yeah, I saw it on TV once,” said Bunshichi, the inflection of his voice made it difficult to tell whether he was joking or being serious.

[057]

“I think that I would very much like the chance to challenge you one day,” said Himekawa.

“Really?”

“Would I not make a worthy opponent?”

“Maybe.”

“I would really like to see you in the same condition you have left him,” said Himekawa. He made this bold statement as he let his vision turn back towards Souichiro.

“ ”
...

“Well, everyone gets a turn, don't they.”

“A turn?”

“Yes. He has left a number of opponents looking just like you have left him. Today it was finally his turn.”

“Do you think I'll get a turn?” Asked Bunshichi.

“Someday,” Himekawa said, grinning.

“I think I might want to get out of here before it's my turn,” Bunshichi said to himself as he turned his back on Himekawa's smile. He stopped in front of Ryoji, who was still holding Bunshichi's bag. Bunshichi grabbed the bag out of his arms and gave him a light pat on the shoulder. Bunshichi's pat seemed to snap Ryoji out of the trance he had fallen into. He had been shaking a little.

“So long,” Bunshichi said before walking in the other direction. Ryoji, who stood staring at Bunshichi's back for a moment, suddenly followed after him as if Bunshichi's farewell had flipped some kind of switch inside of him.

“Wait!” he yelled, “Wait for me! Bro! You can't just walk away and leave me here!”

Part One : The Duel

The End.

[058]

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[059]

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[060]

PART II: THE GRUDGE
CHAPTER I

[061]

It was nothing really. Saito's elbow had lightly bumped into the man standing next to him at the bar. The was talking Karate with Bunshichi. Saito was 20 years old and Bunshichi was 16. It was Saito who had invited Bunshichi out for a drink. Bunshichi had grown past 5 feet. His face had matured as well. He had grown some thick and unkempt facial hair making him look a lot older than 16. He looked even older than Saito, maybe 23 or 22 years old.

The bar was cramped. It had been built under a train bridge. There was only standing room inside the bar and you could fit maybe ten people inside at the most. Bunshichi was sitting to the right of Saito. They were drinking sake together. Around seven empty Sake bottles sat around them on the counter top. They had drunk about half each. Saito was a little more drunk than Bunshichi and

Compared to Bunshichi's poker face, Saito was looking a little red in the face.

However it was Saito who overpowered Bunshichi in the Dojo. Even though Bunshichi was taller than him, Saito's foot had made a good sound when it hit the side of Bunshichi's head. Though they were having a conversation, Bunshichi was doing most of the listening.

Saito was talking mainly about his own martial arts accomplishments. He was letting Bunshichi hear about the number of fights he had in the past. Bunshichi had heard all his stories before. The empty Sake bottles would shake against each other and make a rattling sound every time a train passed overhead. He was talking about the time he had a fight with a member of the Karate club from some university.

“So, I knew he was going to try and kick me...” Saito bent his elbow into a the shape he presumably used to absorb the attack as he spoke. That was when Saito's left elbow came into contact with the right arm of the man standing next to him at the bar. The was gripping his glass of beer with his right hand. The freshly poured beer was filled all the way to the top. His drink spilled a little and wet the sleeves of his suit. He hadn't bumped him that hard. It was a light tap if anything. But is was enough to make a full beer spill over. Saito had half turned away from the man, lost in his own story. He didn't seem to have realized what had happened.

“Hey,” the man said in a low voice. Bunshichi realized that something had happened as soon as he heard that voice. Saito most likely heard it as well, but probably didn't realize that the man was speaking to him.

“Hey” The voice had more power the second time

around. Saito felt someone place their hand on his shoulder. Saito finally realized that it was him who was being called on.

[062]

“What are you going to do about this?” the man asked.

“What?” Saito replied, clearly confused. He had no idea what the man was talking about.

“Look!” the man said, holding up his sopping sleeve. Saito still didn't get it. “It's beer,” the man said.

“It's beer?”

“You hit me with your shoulder and got beer all over my sleeve,” said the man.

Saito spoke before thinking.

“OK,” said Saito, bowing his head. He then turned his back on the man again to face Bunshichi and continue his story.

“What the hell was that?” the man said as put his hand back on Saito's shoulder, his voice now much more violent. Bunshichi watched as Saito's red face got even redder.

“What an asshole,” Saito said to Bunshichi, purposely raising his voice loud enough so the man would hear.

“You son of a bitch,” the man said as he squeezed his hand even harder.

“What the hell?” said Saito, ripping the man's hand off of his shoulder. Bam. There came a noise. Saito and the man both stood up. The chairs they had been sitting in were now halfway to the floor. The bar was cramped, so they stopped halfway, leaning

against the wall of the room.

[063]

The man would have been around 25 or 26 years old. He was wearing a blue blazer over his shirt. He had his collar popped and open. He was wearing sunglasses. Bunshichi knew exactly what kind of opponent he would be.

If this type of guy came walking towards you out on the street, you would normally try to avoid making eye contact with him. He's the kind of guy who would pick a fight with a stray cat or dog if he could.

“Take it outside,” the owner of the bar called out from behind the counter. He didn't even bother to look up from the dishes he was washing. This wasn't the first time something like this had happened. He spoke bluntly. “You can fight all you want outside,” he went on, his eyes still on his

dishes.

Another man stood up behind them. He had been drinking with the man wearing sunglasses. He had brought him along.

“Takimoto...,” the man said, pulling at his arm. He put one hand in his pocket, pulled out a small wallet and placed it on the counter. He then took out a five thousand yen note. He left the money on the counter and returned the wallet to his pocket. He was still holding his friend with his other hand.

“I'll leave the cash here then,” said the man as he pulled at his friend's arm. “Let's go.” He pulled at Takimoto's arm again.

“Kijima,” Takimoto started, turning towards the man who held his arm. His tone showed dissatisfaction.

The man holding Takimoto's arm, Kijima, ignored the bar owner as he was about to hand him his change in coins and pulled Takimoto out of the bar by his arm. The cramped bar again fell silent. It felt subdued. Saito put his seat back up and sat down.

“Shit,” he said before emptying the remaining Sake from his cup to his mouth. “God damn punk.” He no longer felt like continuing his story from before. About ten minutes later they stepped out of the bar. The roads under the train bridge were dark. They walked out from under the bridge to the rear of the station, as opposed to the front. It was around half past ten at night. The street wasn't all that big. The streets were empty save the street lights that stood lonely by the wayside. The two of them were on a narrow asphalt sidewalk that was separated from the road by steel railing. Bunshichi and Saito were walking on the road. They had barely been walking

for a couple of minutes before they heard a voice come from behind them.

“Hey!” it was the same voice as before. Bunshichi knew who's voice it was the instant he heard it.

“What?” Saito called back. The two men from before, Takimoto and Kijima, were standing there. Takimoto had taken off his sunglasses. He was looking at Bunshichi and Saito through narrow eyes. His eyes were dark and calm. He looked much more menacing than he did when he was wearing sunglasses. Takimoto chuckled.

“So, you were saying you know Karate,” said Takimoto as he walked over.

[065]

He was holding something in his right hand. It was fat and black in the shape of a club. The light from

the street lights reflected sharply off the object. It was a beer bottle. As he walked over, Takimoto brought the beer bottle down onto the steel railing that divided the road and the foot path. The bottle struck the metal and smashed. The liquid inside turned to white froth and poured out on to the pavement. He had turned the a bottle of beer into an threatening weapon. The angles and curves formed by the splintered glass were both sharp and blunt. The tip of the bottle looked like it could rip someones cheek clean off.

Takimoto looked over at Saito with brazen eyes. He didn't look like he had came all this way to apologize.

“You were saying you're strong,” said Takimoto, his voice subdued. “Why don't you show me some moves.”

Saito had already taken a cat stance. His left leg was slightly forward and bent at the knee so that

his toes were pointing towards the ground. He had most of his body weight resting on his right leg, which was placed further back and was slightly bent. He used his knees and elbow to get his body into a light fighting rhythm. The edge of his left hand was at the same level as his shoulder and was sticking out, but he didn't have his arm stretched out flat. He balled his right hand up into a fist and held it close to his chest. It was a fighting stance used for fights outside of a Dojo. Takimoto kept walking towards Saito, completely undeterred. He didn't even slow down.

Kijima stayed still. Bunshichi was just standing there as well. Strangely enough, he didn't feel the urge to jump in. It wasn't simply because Saito had started the fight himself and it had nothing to do with Bunshichi.

No, it was because Bunshichi wanted to see how Saito would handle a thug. He thought that if Kijima made a move, then he would as well. But if

Kijima didn't make a move, then neither would he. That's what Bunshichi had decided.

Saito darted to the side as Takimoto approached him. He immediately regained his cat stance. Takimoto changed course and continued to walk towards Saito. Saito was moving his left knee up and down to keep his body in a fighting rhythm. Takimoto had lowered his back slightly as well. His eyes were getting more and more narrow. He thrust the broken bottle in front of himself, aiming for Saito's face. Saito kicked up his left leg. He had been given an invitation.

When Saito's foot reached the spot where Takimoto's right hand should have been, Saito found that it had moved out of the way. He wasn't aiming for Saito's face. He was aiming for Saito's left foot and left knee, which still wasn't fully stretched out. Takimoto rammed the broken bottle into Saito's left knee cap as hard as he could. It made a horrible cracking sound as the glass broke.

Saito let out a cry at the same time. Takimoto had been aiming for Saito's knee from the start. Saito grabbed his knee and fell back on the asphalt. Takimoto sunk his foot into Saito's stomach.

“Hey Karate kid, what's wrong?” Takimoto taunted. Saito spat at the ground. Bunshichi was stunned. He knew first hand how strong Saito was. And now he was getting beaten by a petty thug right before his eyes. He couldn't believe it.

[066]

Bunshichi wanted to save Saito, but his body wouldn't move. He didn't want to see Saito getting beaten like this. He wanted to see Saito make a counter attack and knock the thug over.

“Tanba!” Saito called out. His voice was asking why Bunshichi wouldn't help. Bunshichi didn't move. He looked over to Kijima. Kijima showed

no emotion as he watched his friend attack Saito.

“Fucking prick...,” said Takimoto, his voice ringing in Saito's ears. Saito grabbed Takimoto's leg as it hit and held it to his stomach. Saito looked desperate. He used his right leg to knock the gangster off his feet; he had one foot in his hand and kicked the other leg out. Takimoto fell backwards on the asphalt. The back of his head hit the asphalt with a thud. His jagged glass weapon fell from his hands. Saito them straddled Takimoto, who had at this point gotten a concussion.

Saito started punching Takimoto in the face. The were normal, fist-fight punches. When it came down the sheer strength, Saito had the upper hand. Saito lessened his attacks a little. He had let his guard down. Bunshichi was watching so Saito had wanted to win this fight using proper Karate techniques. Bunshichi could now see that Saito had intended to get Takimoto to the ground with a single attack.

It wasn't just that his opponent was used to fighting. It was a mixture of skill, luck and him letting his guard down. Saito had taken the initiative and struck back, but he had completely forgotten his Karate.

[067]

He was just pummeling his opponents face with his fists. His punches fell from just below his shoulders. Blood came flowing from his opponents face. Takimoto's face was getting drenched in blood. Bunshichi was watching the spectacle from the side.

Kijima's expression hadn't changed. He was a strange guy. It seemed like he had no intention of getting involved in a fight that had nothing to do with him. Halfway through the fight, two cars

drove past. It hadn't even been three minutes since the fight started.

“Shit,” Takimoto gasped. He shoved his right hand into his blazer. “You little shit!” His right hand moved. A beam of reflected light from the metal went straight up from beneath Saito's chin and knocked him to the side. Bunshichi saw it. Once the metallic beam of light was pulled out/removed, a spray of dark came out from just below Saito's chin. It was like he had a mouth-full and was spitting it all out. There was thick spray, as thick as your fingers and a mist like spray that all came out together. The liquid poured down on Takimoto's face. All the liquid started to form a pool around his head and started to flow onto the asphalt of the road.

The spray died down quickly. The last of the liquid built up on the opening of the wound in time with the final beat of his heart. Saito stopped moving. Bunshichi cocked his head to the side. Bunshichi's

eyes looked as though they wanted ask what had happened, as he couldn't comprehend the situation. His mouth was open.



Bubbles of blood rose up from between Saito's lips. Saito's eyes became distant. He fell face-down on top of Takimoto.

A horrid smell wafted into Bunshichi's nose. It was the smell of blood. Bunshichi's legs were trembling. Fear came from the soles of his feet and raced through his entire body. He couldn't he was speechless. After a little while it seemed that something was going to come forth from his lips. Bunshichi knew that it would be a scream. He knew that if he were to scream, it makes things a little easier to handle. But no sound left his mouth. It was as if the scream itself had gotten caught in his throat.

Takimoto crawled out from under Saito's body. He was gripping a blood stained knife in his right hand. Takimoto looked around as he was about to get up. Bunshichi was the only one left. Kijima had gotten himself out of there at some point. Takimoto got up. His face and his hair were both covered in blood. Droplets of blood dripped from his matted hair. He glared at Bunshichi.

“You wanna wind up like this?!” he barked. Bunshichi wanted to run. But he felt like that as soon as he made a move he would end up on the ground. He had pissed himself. His crotch felt warm.



YOU
WANNA
WIND UP
LIKE THIS
!!?



I've got to get out of here, he thought to himself. He wanted to run away, go home and forget about everything that had happened. He wanted to jump into his futon and go to sleep. He would never even think about learning Karate again. But he didn't know which way he should run. He was panicking. He turned forward and took a look at the man. He had his lips curled up over his blood stained teeth. He couldn't take it anymore. His throat exploded. A spirit-like scream came from his lips. It wasn't a scream. It was a howl.

He ran. Bunshichi's fate from then on was to be decided by the path he ran down. Bunshichi quickly looked back at the man who had stared at him with those horrible eyes as he ran from the scene.

CHAPTER II

[069]

The room was dark. Dark, but not pitch-black.

[070]

A man was lying on his back, and the woman next to him was lying on her side, resting her head on his shoulder and moving her hand around in circles on his chest. The sheets came up to their waists. The woman was half draped over the man, her right breast was sitting on the man's upper left chest. Her complexion was fairer than most. He had the same skin tone as she did. It wasn't only their skin. Both had long hair that fell down to their

shoulders. The man had a strange smile on his face. At a glance, they looked like two women sleeping.

However you could quickly tell that one of them was a man by his defined shoulders and arms. His chest rolled with clearly defined chest muscles. The woman had her eyes closed but the man had his open as he lay on his back. Tsutomu Himekawa. That was his name.

Himekawa wasn't staring at the ceiling, it was as if he was staring at something far off in the distance. You couldn't see it because of the sheets, but the woman's right leg was curled over his left leg. She was lightly rubbing her leg against his. She looked to be around 20 years old. She opened her eyes. She had big, wide eyes. She opened her mouth to talk, even though her lips were still resting on Himekawa's chest. It was like she was about to whisper to his heart.

“What are you thinking about?” she asked. It's a

line that women use to get silent men to tell them what's on their minds. Himekawa didn't answer. "What are you thinking about?" she asked again.

[071]

"I'm not thinking about women," said Himekawa.

"So you're thinking about men?"

"Yeah."

"Who? Who's the guy?"

"Bunshichi Tanba." The woman next to him got a sudden rush of nerves as soon as Himekawa had said the name. "I was thinking about the man who beat up your father."

"..."

"He's a strange one." The right hand that was

resting on Himekawa's chest slowly made it's way down his body. Up and over his chest and underneath the sheets. Those white fingers found what they were looking for. They started touching him.

“You're leaving tomorrow, aren't you?” she asked.

“I've already made plans.”

“Oh yeah, that's right.” she said before running her teeth over his nipple.

“Everyone involved will start wanting to know more information and all the details of what's been going on.”

“...”
...

“Mr. Izumi has gotten back on his feet, so he will probably be fine,” said Himekawa, the woman looked up at his face as he spoke. Himekawa had

deep, brooding eyes.

“Well I'm not fine,” she said. “I wonder how long I can hold on for.” she continued with a smirk.

“.....”

[072]

“You're the one that made me like this,” she said, the movements from under the bed sheet started to get faster. Himekawa gave a bitter smile. He probably wasn't the one who made her a woman. Two months ago when he first slept with her, Saeko Izumi, he knew that she was no stranger to men. When he entered her for the first time, she raised her hips as she raised her voice.

What Saeko was trying to say was that she only became the kind of woman that would reach out and grab a man all on her own since she had been with Himekawa. Talking dirty halfway through the

act, and holding her mouth closed when Himekawa got going. Himekawa had made the first move, but it had been Saeko that had seduced Himekawa. Walking around the house in her nightie, asking Himekawa to bring her soap when she was taking a bath.

Both were fine with it. Himekawa was fine with her as his lover for the time being. It wasn't because she was the daughter of a martial artist, but because she had a tight, voluptuous body. She could take on any kind of might with her supple limbs. She was quick to learn the arts of the bedroom. Her face and figure were much better than average. She had the kind of beauty that made her look a little dangerous.

For Himekawa, who's only redeeming feature was his strength, it was a complete mystery how he managed to bed this woman. It seemed she was less like her father and much more like her mother, who died around 10 years ago.

But the only thing on Himekawa's mind was Bunshichi. The man was like a cliff face. He had brought some strange kid along with him to the meeting point, and was waiting patiently in a pair of trainers.

[073]

He was big, but also knew how to keep his balance. He could tell just by remembering his muscles that his body made for full contact fighting. It was a mystery how he had never heard of his name until recently. He would have no trouble cleaning up if he were to enter into regional competitions. Then again, a guy like him wouldn't be able to fight like himself in a competition with rules. He smelled like a wild beast. There was the one thing that he had in common with Ichiro Koizumi. He too had become a black sheep in the world of martial arts. While he had talent, his techniques were far too

dangerous to be able to use in a sanctioned match.

But there was one more man like Bunshichi and Souichiro. That was Shozan Matsuo, head of the Kitatatsu training hall. Himekawa wanted to meet him again. He wanted Bunshichi Tanba to meet him. Thinking about that meeting brought a little smile to Himekawa's face.

“Hey.”

Himekawa looked down to find her face looking up at him.

“Let's do it one more time...” she said with puppy-dog eyes. What she was holding under the sheet was now rock hard. Without saying a word, Himekawa tore the sheets away. The thing sitting between her fingers was looking straight up at the ceiling. She changed her position and wrapped her lips around the tip, and went all the way down to

the base. She was one intense woman.

[074]

She then twisted her head from side to side while making her tongue dance inside her mouth, all while holding Himekawa's member at it's base. She slowly pulled her head back. She was becoming more and more like who she really was. She paused for a moment, a smile on her face. She was lashing her tongue around in her mouth. Himekawa stretched his arm out and grabbed her backside. Saeko knew exactly why. She moved her waist and put her knees over Himekawa's face. He could see her flesh colored cave. She was dripping wet. Himekawa was looking at her in the dim light. She lowered herself down on his face as if getting impatient.

Himekawa smiled as he opened her up with his fingers. His tongue was touching her. That was enough to make Saeko wriggle her hips. She made

a muffled sound as she held him in her mouth. She took her lips off of him and further lowered her hips onto Himekawa's face. She was still stroking him with her right hand.

"I don't care if you have to leave!" Saeko said. She was rubbing herself in Himekawa's face as she spoke. "You can leave, just do it to me now!" she said, raising her voice. "Do it! Do me to death!" she cried out. Himekawa pulled himself out from under the woman once he had finished using his tongue. She grabbed at the bed sheets and stuck her hips up out in the air. She looked like a wild animal.

[075]

He had only just finished licking her. She looked like she couldn't wait any longer. He had planned on teasing her even more. Thinking about making Saeko go mad with sexual madness made his lips begin to open. Himekawa fell down to his knees

behind Saeko, who had her hips perched up in the air. Himekawa got closer to her. Saeko enticed him by moving her hips around. Her hips moved quickly, begging Himekawa to push himself inside. It was their last night together, so she was even more worked up than usual. She was wet enough. Himekawa's tip slid in much easier than he thought it would. Saeko let out a high pitched groan. She felt sharp vibrations from her head down to her toes. She looked like she was about to climax from the first thrust alone. Himekawa started freely moving as Saeko moved her hips from left to right.

CHAPTER III

It was a small bar. The air was thick with cigarette smoke and filled with the Kansai dialect. It would only take about 15 people of so to fill the bar to the

brim. There were two box seats and a line of stools at the counter. There were only two free seats left. The counter was made from wood. The bar was covered with bulging ash trays and over turned sake cups.

[076]

Marks left by dried up liquor were everywhere. Bunshichi Tanba and Ryoji Kubo were sitting at the very end of the bar. Bunshichi was drinking. There were two sake cups sitting next to each other, so it seemed that Ryoji was drinking as well. They were watching a TV that sat above the entrance of the bar. Bunshichi had forgotten his drink and had his eyes glued to the TV set. Ryoji didn't look like he was all that interested.

It was a wrestling show. It had just come back on, but hadn't been long since it started. A prominent Japanese wrestler was going up against a foreigner. They were jumping around the ring,

bouncing each other off the ropes. Using the bounce of the rope, the Japanese wrestler punched the foreigner in the chest. The foreign wrestler absorbed his punch by sticking his fat chest out. It was as if the Japanese wrestler's fist did no damage at all. The Japanese wrestler punched his foreign opponent in the chest a number of times, until the foreign wrestler suddenly grabbed the Japanese wrestler by the arm and pulled it upwards.

The foreign wrestler floored the Japanese wrestler and brought his elbow down into his back. The Japanese wrestler crawled back up undeterred. The foreign wrestler who had pulled the Japanese wrestler up to his feet. He grabbed the Japanese wrestler by the shoulder and arm, and threw him.

[077]

The Japanese wrestler flew back-first into the corner of the ring. The foreign wrestler then

charged into the Japanese wrestler with his shoulder. He buried his shoulder into the Japanese wrestler's body. The ref was about stop the fight, but the foreign wrestler had no intention of stopping. The booming voice of the announcer continued non-stop.

“Shit,” Ryoji said to Bunshichi, “this is bullshit, why are we even watching it?” Bunshichi didn't answer. Instead he just brought a sake cup up to his lips. He was thinking about the past. The bar he was in now felt like the bar he had been drinking in with Saito. He was about as old as Ryoji is now. Bunshichi could still remember the look in Saito's eyes the moment he died. The Japanese wrestler appeared again with a black eye. The image of Saito's face hovered over the face of the Japanese wrestler in Bunshichi's mind. He wondered if Saito was ever in a match like this one. Bunshichi didn't notice his cup had ran dry as he had been thinking so much. Ryoji filled Bunshichi's cup with liquor as he had been doing all night. He was

sulking a little.

“This is all scripted though isn't it? These fights are fixed for sure,” said Ryoji. Bunshichi turned and faced Ryoji for the first time. There was a light in his eyes that Ryoji had never seen before.

[078]

“Dude, what?” asked Ryoji. He spoke as if he felt pressure coming from Bunshichi's stare. Bunshichi remained silent.

“What is it?” Ryoji asked again.

“Maybe it is scripted, I don't know,” said Bunshichi in a low voice, “but there is one thing I know for certain,” he went on, subtle fear in his voice.

“...” Ryoji remained silent.

“Some of them are really strong,” said Bunshichi, as sharp gleam in his eyes.

That was when the announcer called out the

Japanese wrestler's name, Kajiwara. That's right Mr Kawabe, it looks like Kajiwara has returned. The announcer was speaking to the commentator. At some point the foreign wrestler had won the match and the TV screen had switched over to the announcer and the commentator. He certainly has, and it would be nice if he were able to bring the championship belt home with him. The commentator answered the announcer with a smooth voice.

There came a sharp sound from inside Bunshichi's hand. It was the sound of his sake cup cracking between his fingers.

PART TWO : THE GRUDGE

The End.

PART III: THE PAST

CHAPTER I

[079]

It was a narrow road. There was nothing there save a simple, abandoned mechanics workshop. The inside wasn't even set up properly. There was a ring, some dumb bells, a bench press, and a punching bag that hung from the ceiling. A simple tarpaulin sheet divided the training room from the shower room. The rolling garage doors were open, but the training room was still hot and muggy.

In front of the ring lay a pair of koshti; dumb-bell like training equipment that are used to increase

arm strength. They are thick wooden club-like objects, around 60 centimeters in length. The handles are thinner, but they still weigh about 11 kg each. You pick up one with each hand and push them up above your shoulders. They are made in Pakistan. They work your forearm muscles, triceps and deltoids. You lift them over your back and back forward again. Even those who are confident in their arm strength see them as a challenge.

The summer sun beat down from above out side of the training room. The sunlight cast a thick shadow from the roof.

[080]

The heat from inside the training room, however, was not borne from the light above. The heat from the bodies of men training in silence far outweighed the heat of the sun.

It was a hot day. It would have been around around 38 degrees. You would break a sweat just by standing up. The sun felt like sandpaper on the shoulders. Bunshichi Tanba stood in the sun, looking into the training room. He was only wearing jeans and a t-shirt. There was a sports bag sitting at his feet. There were two middle school aged boys holding cameras, their lenses pointed at the men inside. While they were outside of the training room, there wasn't really anything fencing them off. The rolling garage doors that divided the inside and outside were raised. The two school boys were whispering the names of the wrestlers they recognized as the held their lenses up to take pictures. They were using zoom lenses that were pretty expensive for a kid in middle school.

In the ring there were a group of three wrestlers practicing their grappling moves. One wrestler had another wrestler in a lock and had bent his wrist and elbow back impossibly far. The wrestler caught in the hold struck back at his opponent with

his free hand. The wrestler released his hold and began trying to make another one. You couldn't ignore the strong smell of oil that hung in the air.

"OK," came a low voice from inside. The voice came from a short and dumpy man, who looked short compared to the others. The men training both in and out of the ring stopped what they were doing. Everyone was dripping with sweat.

[081]

Most of the wrestlers were wearing t-shirts. Old, worn out T-shirts. A subtle look of relief fell over the faces of the wrestlers. Even if you were to call them wrestlers, they all still looked quite young. They all had fresh cuts and bruises on their faces. It didn't look like there were any new members there either. It was more like they had finally found enough members to run classes. The short and dumpy man, the one who had called out before,

was holding a bamboo fighting stick.

“Kawabe!” The middle school students next to Bunshichi whispered to each other as they raised their cameras. It seems that Kawabe was the name of the short and stumpy man. He glimpsed over towards Bunshichi. He silently returned the gaze. Kawabe took a couple of steps towards Bunshichi. It seemed as though Kawabe had taken notice of him, who had been standing there with a cold glare for a while.

“You here to join up?” grunted Kawabe.

“No,” said Bunshichi. He had no intention of joining. He didn't have much interest in pro-wrestling. He hadn't even realized that there were training halls for pro-wrestlers. He had just been walking past, saw people training and decided to stop and take a look. He didn't know that it was a training hall for a group of pro-wrestlers. Wrestlers have much more muscle on their bodies

than you would imagine on a normal person, but Bunshichi thought that their fights were nothing but one big show. He remembered having reading comments from wrestlers that their matches were not fixed. They are serious fights, they have real muscles... that's what Bunshichi remembers reading.

[082]

But then, if you wanted something serious, the same could be said about acrobats up on a circus tightrope, as they too are serious and have real muscles. Being serious and having muscles were just signs of putting on a good show. Bunshichi thought the wrestlers bouncing each other off the ropes of the wrestling ring was just a waste of time. He couldn't say he was a huge fan of the free for all matches where people could use weapons. It was just too ridiculous watching those huge men

pretend that they were fighting. With that in mind, standing here watching reasonably serious practice fights took Bunshichi off-guard. Although didn't change his opinion of pro-wrestling.

Kawabe looked Bunshichi over with an unrelenting stare. He moved a little closer. He was shorter than Bunshichi, but he was wider around the middle. If you were to only see an outline of his body, he would probably look obese, but looking at him close up you could tell that he was made of muscle. It looked like an untrained fist would probably bounce right off of him. The fabric of his t-shirt, which was wrapped around his muscles, had begun to stretch.

“You're in pretty good shape,” said Kawabe. His voice was rough, as if his throat had collapsed. A dark spot had formed in Bunshichi's moss-green t shirt from sweat.

“Beef up a little more and you'd be perfect,” said Kawabe.

“I was thinking the same thing,” said Bunshichi. He stood at 160cm tall and weighed 98kgs. That's how big Bunshichi was back then.

[083]

He still had the body of a 25 year old. It was the kind of body that forged through training. He wasn't bulky however. Bunshichi thought that putting on my more muscle than necessary would be a waste.

“Are you in training for something?” asked Kawabe.

“Karate,” said Bunshichi.

“Oh, right,” said Kawabe sounding less than impressed. It seemed like any interest he had in Bunshichi was now gone. Kawabe turned his back on Bunshichi. Kawabe didn't say anything but, Bunshichi took that as an insult.

“Wait just minute,” said Bunshichi.

“What?”

“Who is the strongest one here?”

“You want the strongest?” asked Kawabe, his eyes narrowing as he spoke, “they are all about the same level, and we are just now trying to see who's the strongest.”

“What about the others?”

“Others?”

“The older members.”

“They are all on a provincial tour.”

“Are they now?”

“Yeah, the main fighters as well as some of openers and the main-eventer. Everyone here is either a opener or below”. All the fighters around the ring were standing and staring at Bunshichi as they caught their breath. They looked as if they thought something might happen.

“Who's strong?” Bunshichi asked again.

“Our strongest Toyoo pro-wrestler is our boss, right?” said Kawabe as he looked around the room.

A few of them had grins on their faces. Kawabe was talking about The Great Tatsumi, their 'boss', who was the main-eventer. It's not uncommon for groups in the wrestling world to have one top fighter, or a 'boss' who acts as draw-card to entice people to come to matches. When Kawabe said that their boss was strong, he was also talking about his ability to draw a crowd. Bunshichi, however, didn't quite understand what Kawabe was talking about. Bunshichi thought that Kawabe might have a few screws loose.

"Let me take a crack at your strongest wrestler," said Bunshichi. His voice had changed. Bunshichi didn't even think about what he was saying until the words had left his mouth. Kawabe looked at Bunshichi with an annoyed look on his face.

"You're here to challenge our Dojo?"

"That's right."

"Forget it, you'll only get yourself hurt," said Kawabe before turning back again. There was a tangible sense of nervousness that came from the

young wrestlers.

“We get people like you come by every now and then,” said Kawabe. It was the first time Bunshichi had heard someone call a training hall for wrestlers a Dojo, but then if people were coming to challenge the Dojo, then it would have to be called a wrestling Dojo. It seemed like Bunshichi wasn't the first to challenge them. The other wrestlers look genuinely curious. How far would he get? What kind of moves would he use? Would Kawabe take him up on his offer? Who would he face off against? Bunshichi knew what they were thinking.

Looking around the room, Bunshichi could tell that the wrestlers were big, but most of them looked quite young. They all had piercing eyes, even if some of them were still in their teens.

“You won't know until you let me try” said Bunshichi, pursing his lips defiantly.

“That's what they all say,” said Kawabe as he scratched at his neck with the fat index finger of his left hand.

“Well, I guess you can't have a matches if you don't have a proper ring,” Bunshichi mumbled.

Kawabe's expression quickly changed. He looked at Bunshichi with an intense glare. It was almost as if Kawabe's entire body puffed up for a moment. He narrowed his eyes, tilted his head down a little and looked straight at Bunshichi.

“You can't back out,” said Kawabe, slowly and quietly, “even if you get down on your knees and beg.” Kawabe's voice was getting lower and lower as he spoke.

“I don't intend to back out.”

“I don't want to hear any complaints if you break an arm.”

“You wont.”

“It won't be my problem if you can't walk home

because you're so messed up."

"That's fine," said Bunshichi. Kawabe finally nodded his head. Once he lifted his head, Kawabe looked straight at Bunshichi.

"I'm gonna need you to sign an agreement."

"Agreement?"

"Saying that you won't complain if you get your arm broken," said Kawabe. He had a look on face that said 'get yourself out of here before you get yourself hurt'. Bunshichi faced Kawabe and returned his stare.

"You should probably sign one as well," said Bunshichi.

"Me?"

"Aren't you the one that's going to take me on?"

"No, not me. You'd wind up dead if you took me on."

[086]

"I thought you'd say that."

“Oh really?”

“It's the same everywhere I go. Everyone I challenge gives me the same answer.”

“...”

“They always get one of the younger members to stand in for them. They never do it themselves. It's always the same thing.”

Kawabe fell silent for a moment. His lips parted slightly as he began to re-think the situation.

“No, I better not.”

“Are you going to let the boss take your place?”

“No, the boss ain't here. He's not here, but there is someone else that might be a good match for you,” said Kawabe as he turned and looked behind him, “someone get me a pen and some paper.” One of the younger members brought over a pad and a pencil. Kawabe took the paper and pencil and walked over to the side of the ring. He put the pad down on the ring and started writing something.

“Come here,” he called out to Bunshichi once he had finished writing. “How does this sound?”

Bunshichi looked down at the paper sitting on the ring. It was laid out quite simply.

The top line read, 'Agreement', followed by the following passage;

'I agree that regardless of what may happen in today's match, no responsibility will fall on my opponent.'

Next to that passage there were spaces for two people to sign their names and the date. The lettering was quite skillful.

[087]

One of the younger fighters got the ink ready for their personal seals.

"Sign your name and stamp you seal," said Kawabe. Bunshichi took the pencil, signed his name and stamped his seal. He wasn't really sure if

something like this would stand up in court. However, he really had no intention of complaining should he lose the fight. He wouldn't want his opponent to complain either. Bunshichi thought that a contract like this would benefit himself.

He had watched them train and was impressed at their strength. However he didn't think he would lose. Bunshichi was training as well. At least four hours a day. He thought that his training was harder than theirs. Also, Bunshichi thought, he wasn't putting on a show. He was fighting for real. He was confident. He had taken on guys with knives more than a few times. He had no intention of holding back. If he let his guard down he would wind up with a broken arm.

“Who's my opponent?” asked Bunshichi.
“I'm not really sure who to pick. I'll be able to choose a good opponent once I see how good you really are. Although anyone would do against you.”

Kawabe's voice was quiet, all the way to the last word. There were probably some people who made it this far only to turn around and run home. "Go and give that punching bag a kick," said Kawabe.

"You trying to see my fighting style?"

"Were not going to see your fighting style just from a couple of kicks to a sand bag. Just give it a kick, you don't have to give it one hundred percent. You were looking down on us training, weren't you?"

[088]

"Could you let me get changed first? I can't really move in these clothes. I'll kick it once I've changed."

"Alright, go get changed in that shower room over there." Kawabe motioned to the shower room next to them with his chin. Bunshichi nodded without saying anything. He grabbed his bag and walked over to the 'shower room'. It was a pretty shabby

looking shower room. It was in the corner of the hall. There was a support beam which had tarpaulins to the left and right attached with wires. He could hear the sound of running water. Someone inside was having a shower.

“Someone's already in there,” said Bunshichi.
“Who's in there?” Kawabe called out to the young man in the showers.
“It's me, Kajiwara.”

“Oh, it's him.” The sound of running water stopped as soon as Kawabe spoke. The curtain got pulled to the side. A young man, still dripping with water, sluggishly stepped out of the shower room. Bunshichi felt as though a cliff face made of muscle had suddenly appeared before him. He stood looking at a man who was even bigger than he was. He had small, round, charming eyes. He was about the same age as Bunshichi, perhaps a little younger. He wasn't the macho type. His skin sagged just a little bit.

He was completely naked. You could clearly see what was hanging from his crotch. He didn't have much hair on his body. His eyelashes were cute and lady-like.

[089]

He lowered his eyes a little when his line of vision met with Bunshichi's.

“Hi,” he said in a small voice that came from the back of his throat. He turned and grabbed a towel that had been hanging from a nail in one of the support beams. He wasn't wearing anything on his feet. This would be the first time that Bunshichi Tanba and Kajiwara Toshio saw each other.

Bunshichi turned his head downward and quietly entered the shower room, all the while keeping his gaze on Kajiwara, who was drying himself off. The tap stuck out of the wall. There was a blue vinyl hose hung from the tap. The hose was pinned

up on the wall and at the end of the hose is what could only be described as the head from a watering can, which was kind of like a shower. Bunshichi figured that this wrestling club didn't have a lot of money. The ring that Bunshichi was looking at now was way below the level of the showy wrestling rings he had seen on TV. It had been built inside a mechanics workshop. The shower too. The place still had the smell of oil.

He looked at the shower. It was the shower that Kajiwara had just used. It was still dripping. It was a hand made shower. This was the first time that Bunshichi got that strange shiver down his spine from pro-wrestling. Bunshichi didn't know that east-west pro-wrestling had come about only a year ago. The president was a wrestler known as the Great Tatsumi, and he had quite the mainstream wrestling following and founded east-west pro-wrestling. It was a federation not linked to any television network or broadcasting commission.

Even Bunshichi knew about Great Tatsumi.

[090]

He could vaguely remember seeing him fight on TV. But even that was from when the Great Tatsumi was still in mainstream wrestling. He wondered if Tatsumi used this shower.

Bunshichi slowly got changed. Once changed he left the shower room. He was wearing just a loose pair of jogging pants with a supporter. Muscles bulged all over his body. But it wasn't the fruits of body building. They were muscles formed from had-to-hand combat, used for fighting. If he did start body building, then he would surely bulk up even more, with beautifully defined muscles, but bodies like those aren't suited for fighting. His body would become rigid and kill his dexterity.

Bunshichi's physique was ideal for fighting. However, all over his body were marks that only could have been left by blades.

Bunshichi walked, barefoot, over to the punching bag. Bam. He hit the bag with his open palm. "May I?" he asked. Kawabe nodded. All eyes were on Bunshichi. Kajiwara looked over with curious eyes as he noticed that something was about to happen. He had put on a T shirt and a pair of shorts. Bunshichi judged the distance between him and the bag, and closed in halfway. He put his left foot out first, put his strength into both his knees, and held his fists up just in front of his chin. He lowered his back a little and built up a fighting rhythm with his elbows and stomach before suddenly letting his right foot fly.

There came a heavy thud. The sole of Bunshichi's foot was perfectly stretched and was sitting burrowed into the punching bag at a level even higher than his head.

He slowly put his foot back on the ground. That kick would have been powerful enough to take a small child's head right off it's body.

"Hmm," Kawabe mused to himself, "you know how to kick." When Kawabe said 'kick', he was referring to a kick-boxing style of kick.

"You know about kick-boxing?"

"Just a little."

"I've been in the ring a few times."

"Very impressive."

"Did you think I only did karate?"

"More or less." As he spoke, he stared at the young men in the room. It looked as if he was sizing up an opponent for Bunshichi. "Kajiwara, you can go," he said, spitting his words at the boy. Everyone turned around and looked. Kajiwara let everyone stare at him, without understanding what was going

on.

“You're going to fight this guy.”

“Me?”

“He said that he wanted a 'match'. You're his opponent.”

“...” Kajiwara didn't answer, but was finally able to understand what was happening from Kawabe's words. He also realized that Bunshichi had come to challenge the wrestling club.

“You saw him kick, didn't you? I don't want to hear any complaints if he kicks you do death,” Kawabe said to Kajiwara.

“OK,” said Kajiwara before turning to face Bunshichi.

[092]

There was something in his voice, and his eyes were narrow and piercing. His head was tilted downwards, but his viper-like eyes stabbed up from below at Bunshichi. His wooden sandals sounded on the concrete floor as he walked over

and pulled himself up into the ring with agility. He had left his sandals on the floor in front of the ring. He was barefoot in the ring. In just his T shirt and shorts.

“Are you ready?” asked Kawabe.

“Ready,” answered Kajiwara, lowering his vision. “He's just right, ain't he? He's 24 years old. There shouldn't be that much age difference between you. He joined when he was 20, and had been training for 4 years before that,” said Kawabe.

“10 years all up,” said Kajiwara from inside the ring.

“The years before that were full of fights,” said Kawabe.

“What are the rules?” asked Bunshichi.

“Right, the rules. No kicks to the balls and no eye gouging. That should about do it,” said Kawabe casually.

“There are no rope-breaks and no ring-outs either,” said Bunshichi.

“No attacking a man when he's down. Just go until

the other one stops moving or if you don't think you can take it anymore."

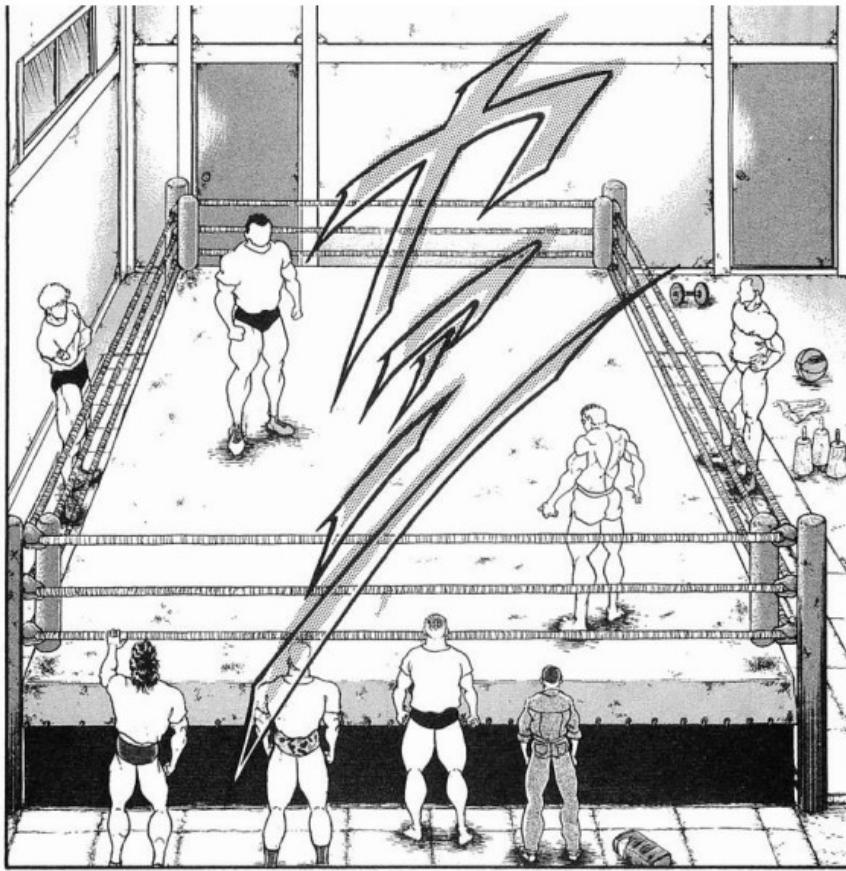
"What about the agreement?"

"I'll write it in for him."

"Make sure you write it properly. I don't want to hear any complaints after I win," said Bunshichi as he silently pulled himself up into the ring.

[093]

The ropes vibrated. He took to the center of the ring and stared at Kajiwara's face. Snake-like yes were looking at Bunshichi from Kajiwara's lowered face. When their eyes met, Bunshichi felt a shiver run down his spine. Bunshichi couldn't tell if it was a shiver of a fighter, or a shiver of something else. His entire body began to burn red hot.



CHAPTER II

[093]

Kajiwara's body looked smaller than it did in the shower room. Bunshichi immediately knew why. It was because Kajiwara had been wearing thick wooded sandals. He wasn't wearing them anymore. The sandals had made him taller by just a little bit. Even so, Bunshichi was taller than Kajiwara. He looked to be around 185 or 186 cm tall. He was thicker than Bunshichi. His skin was a little loose around his waist. It didn't look as though he had all that much muscle on his body. His arms and legs looked small compared to his torso. His hair was

so short it could almost be called a shaved head.

The bell hadn't sounded yet. They were just standing in the middle of the ring, facing each other. Kajiwara had thick, deep lines running across his forehead. The skin around it was different from the rest of his body. It was like a mandarin in the middle of summer. There were and uncountable number of dimples on his skin. Bunshichi wondered if his head was empty.

There are some in the Karate world who can break tiles with their heads. Smash twenty of them at once with a single blow.

[094]

There were some men in Taiwan who hit nails into wood with their heads. A hardened forehead could do a lot of damage if it is used as a weapon. And what else... Bunshichi continued eyeing up Kajiwara. He looked at his ears and his nose. Both

were squashed. His nose had been flattened to one side. The cartilage in his nose had been completely destroyed and was now more like flesh. It would feel like jelly if you poked at it with your finger tip. His ears were like pieces of paper that had been crumpled up. He would have had to have taken a large number of attacks to the ear.

For a boxer this would have meant that he had poor defense, but he was wrestler, so that wasn't necessarily the case. Even if your defense is poor, there is a need to ready yourself for unexpectedly strong attacks. Either way, everyone has their own rhythm. It looked as though Kajiwara wasn't the least bit acquainted with Karate or kick-boxing. What he needed to be careful of, was his grappling techniques.

There are grappling techniques in Karate and Judo, but Bunshichi was unfamiliar with the grappling techniques of pro wrestling. There must have been different ways to get someone into a hold and

apply pressure that were unique to pro wrestling. It also seemed, to Bunshichi, that there would be even more grappling moves in pro wrestling than in martial arts like Judo. But in order to get Bunshichi into a hold, they would have to catch him first. If all they do is defend, then there is no way they will be able to get anyone into a lock. In order to catch Bunshichi they would have to get ready to take any number of punches and kicks.

They both had a chance of winning. If he managed to catch him, Kajiwara would have the upper hand. But as long as he didn't catch him, Bunshichi would hold the upper hand. He wasn't faking it, but when Bunshichi kicked the punching bag before, it wasn't a full strength kick.

[095]

Bunshichi would have been able to get his foot to a higher point in less time if he had wanted to. The kick he made before was a kick-boxing kick. That

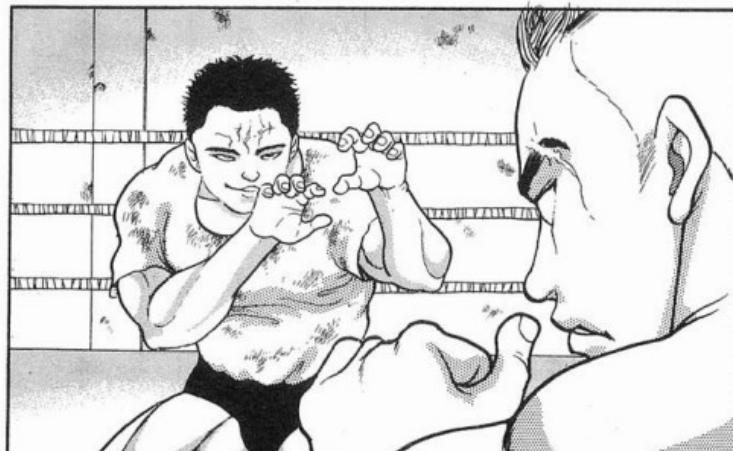
doesn't mean it was a Muay Thai style kick. Bunshichi drew a clear difference between Karate, Kick-Boxing and Muay Thai. They are quite similar but also have subtle differences. In Bunshichi's mind, Kick-Boxing existed somewhere in between Karate and the Thai national martial art of Muay Thai. Muay Thai is called Thai Boxing, and there are people who think it is the same thing as Kick-Boxing, but strictly speaking they should be considered separate martial arts.

Muay Thai is a form of Boxing which allows kicks. Much like the Japanese national sport of Sumo wrestling, it is a martial art with a long history. However it is entirely geared towards actual combat. Just as it would be strange to call Japanese Sumo wrestlers pro wrestlers, it would be strange to refer to Muay Thai as Thai boxing. There are aspects which are particular to Muay Thai. Muay Thai kicks come up from the inner thigh.

When Kawabe asked Bunshichi 'If he kicks', he was referring more to Karate than Muay Thai. It was a kick which flew in a wide arc. If it were a Muay Thai kick, the kick would have come from the knee and moved straight upwards. The type of kick that Bunshichi planned to use in the ring were Muay Thai kicks.

[096]

Kajiwara tucked his chin into his chest and stood like a pole. He had lowered his face, and his scarred forehead was staring straight at Bunshichi. Those warm eyes from before had been replaced with narrow, staring eyes which glared up from under Kajiwara's forehead. They were like the eyes of a different person. They were piercing, and even more frightening. Those eyes looked like a snake that could slither out at any moment.



The bell finally rang. Neither one moved. They stared at one another. Neither of them were close enough to make a move. Taking a step forward and making a wide kick would close the distance between them, but in the time it takes to make the attack, the opponent could escape it. Nearly ten seconds had passed. Kajiwara slid his right hand up over his forehead. He had a cocky smile on his lips, the right corner of his mouth bent upwards.

He slowly began moving to his left. Bunshichi also began moving to his right as he raised both hands in front of his forehead and gripped them lightly. He was using rhythmic footwork. Kajiwara followed the left side of his jaw with the back of his right hand. Kajiwara jabbed in front of himself with his loosely gripped right hand. Bunshichi lightly clenched his palm. Kajiwara lightly opened his.

Bunshichi suddenly started moving in the opposite direction. He raised his right leg up off the canvas of the ring. It was a Muay Thai style kick which came from the knee. The sole of his right foot, the area at the base of his big toe, sunk into Kajiwara's stomach. There was a counter. The timing was incredible.

[097]

Kajiwara loosened up, lifted his entire body upwards and bent backwards. It was just as Bunshichi was pulling his foot away from Kajiwara's stomach that he felt weird sensation coming from the middle of his leg. It felt like what he had struck wasn't even human, more like some kind of reptile. It was like he had kicked a rubber coated cliff edge. It wasn't that hard, but it held

some kind of odd strength. It seemed to have a number of layers. It wasn't made from muscle hardened by training. If it were hard, it would have deflected the attack with even more force. But the muscle that Bunshichi had hit was nothing like that.

It was the type of muscle Bunshichi had never known existed. When he returned his foot to the ground, he closed in on Kajiwara. Kajiwara staggered as he guarded his head with both his arms.

A succession of hits came flying down from above. I have to take him down now thought Bunshichi. This may be my one and only chance to take Kajiwara out. None of his punches directly made contact with Kajiwara's head. His defense was tight. Bunshichi began to tremble with fear as made his punches. He had realized that Kajiwara had already recovered from damage of his last kick to the stomach. It hadn't even been three seconds since he kicked.

However, even if he was guarding, we was still taking the punches. His head would have been taking damage to some extent. Bunshichi could feel something strange coming from inside of Kajiwara's body. Kajiwara suddenly dipped his head downwards.

[098]

An electric jolt ran up Bunshichi's back. Without thinking, he leaned his body backwards and brought his right elbow down on Kajiwara's head. Kajiwara tackled Bunshichi. Kajiwara's hands grazed past Bunshichi's sides.

He had an elbow lodged in his head, so if his speed was anything less than perfect, there would be no way that he could bring Bunshichi down into a hold. Even if he was unsuccessful in bringing Bunshichi down to his knees, the tackle would push Bunshichi's elbow backwards, making the

blow lose around half of its power.

But even so... The kick was so powerful that it would have caused internal damage to someone without a well conditioned mid-section. Even if the hit was at half strength, Bunshichi's blow could have caused a concussion. This was all he could do, having taken a kick to the stomach and an elbow to the back of the head. That was the nature of pro wrestling.

Bunshichi groaned from his stomach. His opponent was still just a junior pro wrestler. Bunshichi and Kajiwara once again faced each other in the ring. Red lines came dripping down from Kajiwara's right nostril. It was blood. It trickled down to his lips. Kajiwara licked the blood. A wicked smile appeared on Kajiwara's face.

"Your face is turning white," said Kawabe from outside the ring. But Bunshichi couldn't hear him. Fear had begun to spread through his body.

CHAPTER III

Kajiwara's face was swollen.

[099]

His forehead, cheeks and the area around his eyes were bleeding on the inside. His features were a mess. He had taken Bunshichi's fists and feet a number of times. He had been knocked over countless times, but had gotten back up. He could have attacked him from above once he fell, but it wasn't worth it. He would be caught in the attack and put into a sleeper hold. Bunshichi was the more frightened of the two.

Bunshichi kicked him over. Again he stood back up. Bunshichi kicked him over again. And again he got back up to his feet. He still had that smile on his face. It was like Kajiwara was amused by Bunshichi's kicks. But they weren't the kicks of an amateur. They were the kicks of a pro in the ring. Kajiwara wasn't very good at defending against kicks like that. Even so, he was defending to the best of his abilities. It was like a bad dream. It wasn't that Kajiwara had been getting an ass-kicking the entire time. Bunshichi's left wrist, left elbow and right shoulder seared with burning pain.

When Kajiwara fall to the mat again, he quickly propped himself to his feet and stood up with unbelievable speed. He mounted Bunshichi from the side. A wrestling hold. Bunshichi tried to dodge the attack. He couldn't. Kajiwara pinned Bunshichi's left wrist to the mat and lifted his left shoulder up off the mat as if using the power of Bunshichi trying to get away against him.

Bunshichi had no idea what Kajiwara had done. He didn't even know how he managed to get his hands around his wrist. He noticed that his arm was folded. He was in pain. It was a technique called an arm-lock, something Bunshichi had never seen before. Bunshichi groaned. He 's broken one of my bones! Bunshichi thought of himself. A cry escaped his mouth. As soon as he did, the pressure on him relaxed. Bunshichi crawled away. His left hand wasn't moving. Bunshichi crouched down and looked at Kajiwara, blood still trickling down his face. His snake-like eyes had vanished, replaced with a look of concern.

Bunshichi kicked him in the face. It was out of fear. Kajiwara hit the mat with both of his hands. And then a succession of kicks came at him. Bunshichi wanted to cry. Don't get up again, he thought to himself. Kajiwara didn't understand why the hand of Bunshichi's attacks were shaking. Kajiwara

rolled across the mat. He left the ring. Kawabe wrapped a large towel around him

“C'mon, don't give up yet,” he said. It was an unbelievable sight. Kajiwara was wrapped in a towel and looking up at Bunshichi. Kajiwara's T-shirt and shorts were splattered with blood. Kajiwara wiped his hands an the towel before getting back up into the ring.

[101]

He had that viper-like look in his eyes again. He spat onto the ring. The glob of red landed on the blue tarp right in front of Bunshichi's feet. There was white inside the red as well. They were fragments of Kajiwara's teeth. Kajiwara slowly pulled himself into the ring by the ropes. Rings for pro wrestling have three ropes. They don't have four ropes like pro boxing rings. The ropes are surprisingly rigid. They are just wire ropes wrapped in rubber. Kajiwara stood with his back

leaning on the ropes. Kajiwara sniggered. One of his front teeth was missing. And then, Bunshichi's nightmare began again.

Bunshichi was more or less fighting with only his right arm. The next time Kajiwara got Bunshichi to the ground was when he took one of Bunshichi's kicks to the abdomen. He wrapped his arm around Bunshichi's left leg, which had hit him. He grabbed Bunshichi by the ankle and brought him down on to the mat. When he fell to the mat, Bunshichi's left leg was being held not by Kajiwara's left arm, but by his right one. Keeping that pose, Kajiwara crammed Bunshichi's left leg between both of his arms.

He began to twist his arm. A sound came from his left ankle. At the same time as the sound, psychological pain came over Bunshichi. No, no, this isn't happening. It felt like someone had struck him over his ankles with a steel pole.

Bunshichi could hear a sound coming out of his throat. It wasn't the sound of him exhaling, rather the sound of him inhaling. He had no air left in his lungs. He was being strangled, and along with the blocked up noise, the air had been pushed out of his lungs. He had locked his Achilles tendon. Bunshichi gritted his teeth. With his right leg, which was free, he tried to kick Kajiwara in the head. Kajiwara easily deflected the attack. His body got rolled over onto the same side which was twisted.

Once he was rolled over he lay face down. Bunshichi was unable to move in that position, being face down. Kajiwara now had Bunshichi in a different hold than before. He had folded his knees and locked his ankles together. Bunshichi's left ankle was wedged in the fold of his right knee. Bunshichi could feel Kajiwara had his right foot

between his thighs. Underneath Kajiwara's right foot was Bunshichi's right ankle.

“Snap it!” came a voice. Bunshichi didn't know whose voice it was. Bunshichi lifted his body up with his elbows. Liquid started to drip down and make a sound on the mat below him. He was sweating. There was also a lot of dirty red stains. They were dried-up blood stains. The canvas had not absorbed the blood which had fallen on it up until now, it had left it there. He raised his head. The world bathing in the blinding light of the sun lay before his eyes. Right in front of his nose. The two junior high school students from before were standing with their cameras.

“The Indian Death Lock!”

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One of the junior high students blurted out. Bunshichi could hear them talking, but couldn't

make out exactly what they were saying.

“No, He 's got him in an upper reverse,” said the other student, “It's a move made up by some Indian.”

“Bullshit.....”

“.....you know?”

It seemed like the pair were talking about the hold that Bunshichi was in.

Bunshichi made a gritty sound with his teeth. He glared forward. Something wrapped itself around his chin. Whatever it was jerked his head upwards. He thought he was about to make a noise, but nothing came out. It felt like his collarbone and his spine were creaking. The sound got further and further away. He realized that the thing which was wrapped under his chin was Kajiwara's hand. But he couldn't figure out why his hand was placed there.

He left his shoulder on the mat and with his right

hand tried to remove Kajiwara's grip from under his chin. In that instant he felt a separate pressure on his neck. The force was twisting his neck. Thick veins began to form on Bunshichi's head. He tried in vain to twist his head in the other direction. And then he saw it. Kajiwara's face was looking straight at him from his right hand side. His head, or rather his cheek, was on the mat. He was moved back to the side the tips of both his feet as well as his forehead were supporting his weight, he lifted his body off the mat and formed an arch in his back.

[104]

His ankle was still held in place. Kajiwara's neck was unguarded. The sound of Kajiwara's labored breathing echoed in Bunshichi's ear. Bunshichi turned his right hand up. He brought the edge of his hand down on the back of Kajiwara's neck. It was a weak attack as Bunshichi could only use the power from his elbow. But it seemed to have some

effect. He had broken Kajiwara's bridge. The power wrapped around his jaw dissipated. Bunshichi jerked his ankle away and crawled away on his elbows. He shook free his other ankle. His left hand had broken the hold from before with just the power of his upper arm. He had put a number of scratches on the mat with his elbows. He had gotten out of the hold.

He opened his palms and tried to stand. He had no power in his ankles. Right in front of his eyes, he saw Kajiwara grab at his throat. He moved up to his knees and advanced on Bunshichi. At any rate, he knew that he needed to stop this man from moving. He lunged at Kajiwara from his kneeling position and mounted his right elbow into Kajiwara's body. Bunshichi put the entire force of his body behind his elbow and brought it down on Kajiwara's nose. Kajiwara's head turned away from the attack pitifully. Bunshichi's elbow had grazed Kajiwara's cheek and hit the mat. There was red left on the canvas after Bunshichi pulled

his elbow away.

He used the same elbow to pull himself across the mat as he had used to pull himself up beforehand.

[105]

The skin on his elbow had split from the last attack. The canvas floor of the ring was like sandpaper. It looked as though it had been created for fights, but beneath it lay steel bones. Above those steel bones lay wooden boards and on top of those lay the thick mat of the ring with the tarpaulin draped over it. At a glance, it looked just as soft, but the damage a fighter took when falling on the areas above the steel poles, and the area not above them, was very different. It seemed that Bunshichi's elbow had hit the area above a steel bar. Even if he hadn't hit a spot above a steel pole, his skin was torn. If it were someone who wasn't trained, getting body slammed on the back would have been enough to peel the skin.

Kajiwara tried to get back up. He got up to his knees and Bunshichi smacked him back down with his elbow. It hit him in the forehead. It was like being hit with a cliff face. Kajiwara went back down to his knees. His face was covered in blood. But there still was a smile on that face.

Bunshichi, like a madman, struck at Kajiwara with his right and left elbows. It was like hitting a cliff face that was bound in raw rubber. Kajiwara was tougher than Bunshichi imagined. His elbows cut through the air. Bunshichi sunk his elbows into Kajiwara's head from a kneeling position.

Suddenly something smothered his head. The amazing attack hit Bunshichi in the face. There came a sound, pa-chi. He didn't know where the sound came from. It was the sound of the cartilage in his nose cracking.

It was a head-butt. A pain, like being stabbed with needles, shot up from his nose to his eyes.

Bunshichi only just managed to block the next head-butt with both of his elbows. A warm liquid flowed from his nose down to his throat. Even if he closed his mouth, there was still plenty of liquid inside. He spat it out. A large amount of blood stained the backs of his arms he was blocking with.

He tried to get up. His left wrist was grabbed as he tried to prop himself up on his left knee. It pulled with great force. It hurt like hell. He didn't try to counter the force that was pulling him and he let it pull him to his feet. He kicked with his right leg. A hit anywhere would be good. At any rate he had to get Kajiwara to let go of his wrist. It felt like his wrist was about to snap.

His knee hit Kajiwara's stomach. But Kajiwara didn't let go of his wrist. Kajiwara pulled Bunshichi's wrist and fell backwards. Bunshichi

fell on top of him. Kajiwara flipped his body over so he was face-down and held Bunshichi's wrist to his stomach. Bunshichi again stuck his knees into the mat trying to get away. Kajiwara slipped his leg in between Bunshichi's legs. He tried to roll Bunshichi over to the side. Bunshichi struck Kajiwara in the back of his head with his elbow. He struck him over and over again.

Kajiwara let go of Bunshichi's wrist. Bunshichi scrambled to his feet. There was extreme pain coming from his left ankle. He kicked with his right foot and fell backwards.

[107]

He saw Kajiwara. Thin lines of blood formed in Bunshichi's vision. Kajiwara slowly rose to his feet. His face was a mess. Bunshichi's face wasn't much better. Kajiwara still had that wicked grin spread across his lips. Bunshichi was wondering if

they would continue. Continue this fight. He had no idea how many minutes had passed since the fight began. It felt like that had been fighting for over an hour. It had started to get to him mentally.

He was surprised a junior pro wrestler was able to last this long. He wondered what Kajiwara was made out of. He started to re-focus himself. Was this guy special? Or maybe every wrestler is this tough. Maybe I'm just weak. He wanted to sit down. But there was no way he could sit down. He tried the best he could to stay focused. He forced a smile on to his face. He wanted to look in a mirror to see if he really was smiling, but that thought soon flew out of his head.

“Thirteen minutes...” came Kawabe's voice from the side. He spoke as if he was quite surprised the fight had lasted this long. “Well, I guess now the real fight begins.” Bunshichi wanted to say something to Kawabe, but nothing came out. Because Kajiwara had faced him and come at him

with an attack.

CHAPTER IV

[108]

Why? Thought Bunshichi. Why didn't Kajiwara break my arm? Not just his arm. His shoulder, wrist, ankle. He had four chances to break those joints. Now having a breather. If he had put any more strength into his attack, that fight would have been decided in an instant. They had an agreement. Regardless of weather it was legally binding, they both agreed not to complain if they got am arm broken. Although even if they didn't sign it, Bunshichi had no intention of laying a complaint.

But every time Kajiwara had Bunshichi in a hold,

he let him go. Bunshichi had decided that he would only tap out if he got his arm broken. That's why he didn't tap out when he was in a hold and gasping for air. Kajiwara released his hold on Bunshichi just before his bone would have broken. Bunshichi couldn't understand why. It seemed like Kajiwara just couldn't bring himself to break someone's arm. Bunshichi thought that Kajiwara was hoping that he would tap out early. Bunshichi almost wanted to tell Kajiwara to just hurry up and break his arm. It would only be a moment of pain.

He wondered how much more pain he would have to endure. Kajiwara was persistent.

[109]

Kajiwara only aimed for his joints. He hadn't seen any of the drop kicks or bouncing off the ropes of the ring like he had seen on TV. He kept going for the joints, as if that other stuff was no fun at all. He had snake-eyes whenever he went to grab

Bunshichi by the joints. That smirk was still on his face. It was like a nightmare. He wanted to match to finish. If he just said the words "I'm out!" the fight would probably be over in an instant. But he wasn't sure if he would be able to make it all the way home after that. He had bragged. Kawabe might jump in the ring and break his arm in place of Kajiwara.

Even if that didn't happen, his body was a mess. But he couldn't let words of defeat leave his mouth. That was the only thing keeping Bunshichi in the fight. Why won't Kajiwara break my arm? Bunshichi wondered. Regardless of the reason, the fight wouldn't be over until his arm was broken. And even if it did get broken, he would have to tap out to end the fight. But then even if he didn't admit defeat, he would probably be thrown out.

Bunshichi was fighting with willpower alone. His left and right arms weren't working. They hurt like hell every time he tried to move them. He fighting

that pain. He wondered if the kicks he had learned in Karate could be used in a situation like this. His opponent was probably too tough.

Bunshichi was thinking about how many decent kicks he could get in. Though maybe he didn't have any decent kicks left in him. Kicking with his right or left leg would do about the same amount of damage, and it would put strain on his already hurting left leg.

[110]

Physical strength was the only thing left to support him after all. He was losing the source of his strength. He could hear Kajiwara's labored breathing. All he could do now was rely on counters, attacks that use the opponents strength against themselves.

It was not as if Kajiwara was uninjured. He looked

a lot like Bunshichi. Bunshichi moved to the right and readied his fists. You couldn't call it foot work. It was like his fists belonged to someone else. They were as heavy as lead. He didn't have enough strength in his arms to support his fists. Kajiwara moved in the same direction. He crossed his legs and lowered his guarding stance. Kajiwara moved. This was his chance. Bunshichi had invited him by crossing his legs. His left leg hurt like hell as he kicked as closely as he could with his right foot. He put the last of his strength into his foot. His foot sunk into Kajiwara's stomach. He felt as if he had put a hole in that cliff face bound in rubber. It felt as if he had sunk his foot into Kajiwara right down to the ankle. He won. Or so he thought.

Something shot up his back. It seemed like it could be a cry of joy. However he couldn't let his guard down. He followed up the kick by planting his knee in Kajiwara's face. His hands answered straight away. Kajiwara wrapped his arms around Bunshichi's leg. He felt something lukewarm on his

knee. It was the slippery, sweaty calf muscle of Kajiwara. Kajiwara twisted Bunshichi's knee.

[111]

Kajiwara had thrown up. His sick was filled with blood. A sour smell filled his nose. Bunshichi brought his hands and elbows down on the back of Kajiwara's head, not caring where the blows would land. He put the last pieces of his remaining strength into those attacks. Hit. Hit. Hit. Hit. And hit. Kajiwara's forehead slipped down from Bunshichi's left knee. The smile had disappeared from his face. Had he win? He was about to give a sigh of relief. Just when a feeling of relief washed over Bunshichi's body it happened.

Kajiwara's body slithered around. He then disappeared from sight. He was suddenly behind Bunshichi's back. He couldn't believe it. How could he have that much energy left? Bunshichi felt

his body get lifted off the ground. Fear shot through his body as he felt it himself being lifted up into the air.

Kajiwara used both arms to grab Bunshichi around the torso from behind. Bunshichi felt weightless for a moment. Then he fell backwards, head first onto the mat. Bunshichi could feel the speed at which he fell. Bunshichi's body made a clean arc and the back of his head struck the mat of the ring. The sky and the ground were flipped. The move was complete.

[112]

Gravity returned. Bunshichi's body couldn't turn over against gravity. A German suplex. That was the name of the wrestling move Kajiwara had just used on Bunshichi. He didn't even have enough time to ask who won. It wasn't a three count victory. He had sat up at some point having been in a daze. Kajiwara had his left hand on Bunshichi's

left shoulder from behind. Kajiwara had his right hand wrapped around Bunshichi's face from behind. It looked like he was going to pull Bunshichi's head clean off.

Bunshichi's left hand was held behind his back. Bunshichi no longer had enough strength to fight back. His neck and shoulder hurt like nothing he had ever felt before. The pain had brought him back to life. Sound escaped his mouth. Because there was so much pressure on his neck, the sound which escaped sounded like the cries of a animal about to be killed.

"Don't you let him go!" yelled Kawabe.

"Kajiwara"

"Kajiwara" the name pierced his head like a needle as it throbbed with pain.

Am I going to die? Thought Bunshichi. He no strength left. A cracking sound came from his shoulder. That's when it happened. A shiver scattered through Kajiwara's body. The force

holding Bunshichi disappeared.

[013]

Bunshichi fell flat on the mat. He knew that he couldn't move any more. He knew that he had lost. He closed his eyes.

When he realized that he had lost, tears fell from his eyes. There had been significant damage done to the joints in and around his shoulder. A number of people climbed into the ring and Bunshichi felt hands on his back. The pulled him up. He looked around in a daze for Kajiwara.

“You idiot!” came a voice from behind him. It was Kawabe. His voice was sharp and piercing. The sound of flesh hitting flesh rang out. Bunshichi twisted his head around and looked behind himself. Kawabe was hitting Kajiwara. He was really smacking him about. Kajiwara stood there and took the blows.

"I'm sorry," said Kajiwara as Kawabe's had went flying towards his face. It was unbelievable.

"WHY!?" Kawabe said, the anger in his voice rising. He was really mad. "Why didn't you do in his shoulder or his arms?" Kawabe hit Kajiwara again. He was fierce. Kawabe was asking Kajiwara, who won, why he didn't break Bunshichi's arm. Kawabe hit Kajiwara again. It seemed as though the fact that Bunshichi was still there had left the minds of both Kawabe and Kajiwara. The tears in Bunshichi's eyes quickly dried up as soon as he laid his eyes on the pair. Bunshichi felt humiliated. There was a black, dark fire. He felt hate build up for Kajiwara, who wouldn't look back in his direction. It was a bitter hate that filled Bunshichi's stomach.

That is what happened one hot summer's day, six years ago.

CHAPTER V

[114]

“Why are you being so quiet?” asked Ryoji. Bunshichi had fallen silent as they watched the live hook-up broadcast of the pro wrestling match. The sake cup he held in his right hand had cracked. The sake inside had slowly leaked out, run through his fingers, down his arm and on to the counter top. His elbows, which he had rolled his sleeves up to, were soaked.

“They had the title taken form them back in America,” said the American announcer.

“That they did,” said the commentator, Kawabe, naming the city and the name of a local title.

“Will it be today? A defending match against the former champion...”

“Indeed. If he can defend the title, he will be able

to go back to America with the belt."

The screen changed over. The ceremony before the main event was being held. The commissioner was calling out the name of the title. Both the announcer and Kawabe's voices spoke over the screen. The screen changed for a second. It changed over to man with his fist held high up in the air and the champion belt wrapped around his middle.

[115]

That man raised his chin in the air and looked down over the crowd. It was Kajiwara. He had that snake-like look on his face. Compared to how he was six years ago, he seemed to have grown as a person. He would have turned thirty this year. The screen quickly turned back to where it was before. Neither the screen nor the announcers words made it to Bunshichi's eyes or ears. He drank the remaining sake in one swig while glaring at the TV screen. The long forgotten pain from his

shoulders and necks flared up.

The chicken wing face lock. That was the name of the move that Kajiwara had put on Bunshichi six summers ago. And he had used it on Izumi Souichiro.

“Let's go,” mumbled Bunshichi as he rose from his seat. He grabbed his jacket from under the counter and picked his bag up off the floor. He pulled some money from his pocket and left it on the counter. “Bro...” Ryoji called out after him, “at least get your change.” Bunshichi was already out the door. He pulled his jacket over himself and began walking away. Cold wind blew right on the front of Bunshichi's massive body. His body was now a lot bigger than it was six years before. His height hadn't changed, but he had put on a lot of weight. He was over 100kg. His chest was really thick.

His shoulders were much wider than those around him. There was a kind of energy that radiated from his body into the night air. He could hear footsteps coming from behind him. Ryoji had come following after Bunshichi.

“That's cold, man, just walking out of there without me,” said Ryoji. He walked up beside Bunshichi. I was about the same, thought Bunshichi. Bunshichi was about Ryoji's age when he first met a named Saito.

“What are you thinking about?” asked Ryoji. He was bored.

“About someone I know,” said Bunshichi
“Someone you know?”

“I was about your age when I first met him. I was such a smart ass.”

“Really?”

“I was always getting into fights, everyday. I would never lose in a one-on-one fight. I thought that being strong would lead me to greatness. If I heard that someone was stronger than me, I would

purposely go and try to fight them.”

“...”

“One of those people I tried to fight was Saito.”

“Did you win?”

“I lost. I got a real beating, left me in pieces. Even though he was smaller than me. He was doing Karate.”

“...”

“So I lost, but I actually felt refreshed. I trained under him as a student. I started going to the Karate dojo which he ran.

“So, what about that guy?”

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Bunshichi fell silent when Ryoji asked him that question. He put his hands in his pockets and took a few steps forward.

“He's dead.”

“Dead?”

“Yeah. He got into a fight with a gang member and got his throat slit.”

Bunshichi suddenly remembered the night that happened. When Takimoto turned to face him, knife in hand. When he pissed himself and ran. He had intended to escape. Even now Bunshichi thought so. He didn't know what he was running from. His muscles cracked in his body, as if something fierce was about to crawl out of his body. That's what he was running from.

WOO
ΔΔHH
!!!!

逃げなき
I'VE GOT
TO RUN!
ツツ

Takimoto just happened to be in the direction he was running. He ran straight into him. His left arm hurt badly. Takimoto had turned around. A knife stuck up out of his left arm. He screamed and pulled it out. Takimoto struck Bunshichi just as he was about to run away. It was like punching a sandbag. Cheek. Chin. Stomach. Nose. Cheek. Cheek. Nose. And then the kicks came. His left arm went numb.

He fought. He fought, but was the same a Saito. The Karate techniques that he had learned wouldn't come out.



THAT I HEARD
HIM ROAR...

初めて耳にする
THAT WAS
THE FIRST TIME...

[118]

He lost all train of thought as he fought. The energy he had built up to run away was now being spent on fighting. He started to hit more than he had been getting hit. He could feel his opponents attack becoming less frequent, and his strength was dwindling as well. Bunshichi felt like he got a new

burst of energy every time he landed a hit. A sudden electric rush shot up his spine with the first hit. Then two more rushes the second time. It was a sensation he had never felt before.

The sensation rose from within his body. When he had seen the blood build up below Saito's chin, something inside of him connected itself, like wires on a circuit board. The sensation that ran through his body came from that circuit board and spilled out into his muscles.

Once he had realized what he was doing, Takimoto lay rolled over on his side next to Saito's like a piece of discarded garbage. That was when Bunshichi knew the path his life would take.

“What did some gang-banger cut his throat for?” Ryoji said to Bunshichi as he walked in silence. Bunshichi didn't answer. He knew he had already said too much. He had spoken too much about the past. It was probably because he saw Kajiwara.

Since that day that Saito died until today, the only person he had ever lost to was Kajiwara.

He had taken on opponents who were stronger than him in the past. He had hit them all with surprise attacks and left them crawling across the floor. He had faced off against Souichiro, who had told him, “I heard you fight dirty”. There had been a lot of things that impressed him about fighting Souichiro.

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First was wrestlers being able to hit with inhuman strength. Next was their pulling power, which was even more than their pushing power. Turning to face one another and having a hand wrap itself around his neck, but it was like a steel arm had pulled his neck back. And the strength of the neck was different to that of someone who boxes or does Karate. The strength of one's neck is determined by how much damage one can negate to

the neck. On top of that, it is determined by how well one can use their neck as a point of support when grappled to change their body position.

How on earth does one train their body for such strength? That's something everyone has to figure out on their own. The training of a wrestler begins with building strength, taking hits and being thrown around the ring. Fighting moves come after that. Bunshichi had worked on his attacks, movement and joints. Fighters of course have to temper themselves against attacks, meaning that they have to build a body that can take an attack even better than it can make them. Bunshichi had, in order to fight, trained his body, but not as thoroughly as a wrestler.

Wrestlers can have up to 200 bouts in a year. Certain overseas wrestlers have over 365 fights in a single year. This means that there are days when they have more than one fight. Forgetting about things like fixed matches, scripted fights of

showmanship, that's still breaking through the barrier into greatness. There is no other sport which takes such a physical toll on the body.

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Even compared to other martial arts, there is a difference in the amount of actual fights. Bunshichi hadn't realized that the number of fights were simply that high as wrestling had become so commercial. There is also no other martial art which has had as much research as grappling.

Bunshichi was thinking about the power exerted in the five minutes between him and Kajiwara six years ago. Even with all the attacks, the kicks and the fists, the difference in grappling, it was really only five minutes. What was the most different? That was probably endurance and the speed of recovery from when they were hit. The strength of their muscles against attacks was the deciding

factor in that fight.

When Kajiwara saw Bunshichi's body and swallowed, thinking that he needed to bulk up, was one year later. At the time, Bunshichi only had the build for making attacks. The larger a fighters muscles are, the more damage they are able to take. And in turn the amount of damage which the opponent takes increases. However, bulking up too much decreases speed. It makes you wonder where the right balance lies.

The right balance is different for everyone, and to get down to brass tacks, there is a need to change the balance depending on your opponent. Ever since losing to Kajiwara, Bunshichi had been thoroughly conditioning his body. He had spent a lot of time learning to grapple. The more he understood about grappling, the more the understood how much more there was to learn. Even grappling with the shoulders and elbows had a proper method, a course to follow. You start with

the wrists, then go on to the elbows and shoulders. But that simple method had a very tight logic behind it. They are rules based on logic and in-depth knowledge of the structure of the human body.

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The grappling moves which enable to you to move from one grapple to the next, or to free yourself from a grapple and counter with another one, are also clearly defined. On top of that, new grappling techniques are always being researched and developed. The effect of a grapple can be changed by something as small as the position of the elbow or the direction a finger is curved. By mere millimeters. Grapples that rely on a person's weight, or their 'pulling power', reach the realms of science.

Bunshichi thought about Kajiwara. He was a

mysterious man. In the moment he had turned to face the fight, his wide, gentle eyes change completely. They became those narrow, snake-eyes. During the entire fight, his lips were pursed into an evil grin. He was like that from the start. Even when he was knocked down and covered in blood, the smile remained on his face.

Even though he had aimed for Bunshichi's joints throughout the fight, he was unable to break any of his bones. There was no point. He was a strong man. Bunshichi couldn't believe that he was one of the junior wrestlers. That Kajiwara will return. Bunshichi looked as though he had remembered Kajiwara's face. How much had changed? Not only had Bunshichi changed, but Kajiwara had probably changed as well.

Bunshichi wondered where he was going. The streets were dark. It was an asphalt road lined with street lights. The lights of a car pulled Bunshichi and Ryoji out of the darkness as it drove past.

Bunshichi pulled his shoulders up around himself as he walked. His blood was boiling. It was boiling hot and showed no signs of cooling. He asked himself if he still hated that man. He didn't have the answer. But when he thought about that man, he remembered his blood coming to a boil. He thought that in sense, he actually liked that man. But he had to ask himself. Did he really want to become like him?

“Bro, what's the problem?” asked Ryoji. Bunshichi kept his eyes ahead and kept walking.

“Let's go,” mumbled Bunshichi. He mumbled those words to himself, not to Ryoji. They were the same words he used when they left the bar.

“Where are we going?”

“Tokyo,” Bunshichi said with a heavy tone. His eyes still fell on the darkness ahead. It was a deep

darkness.

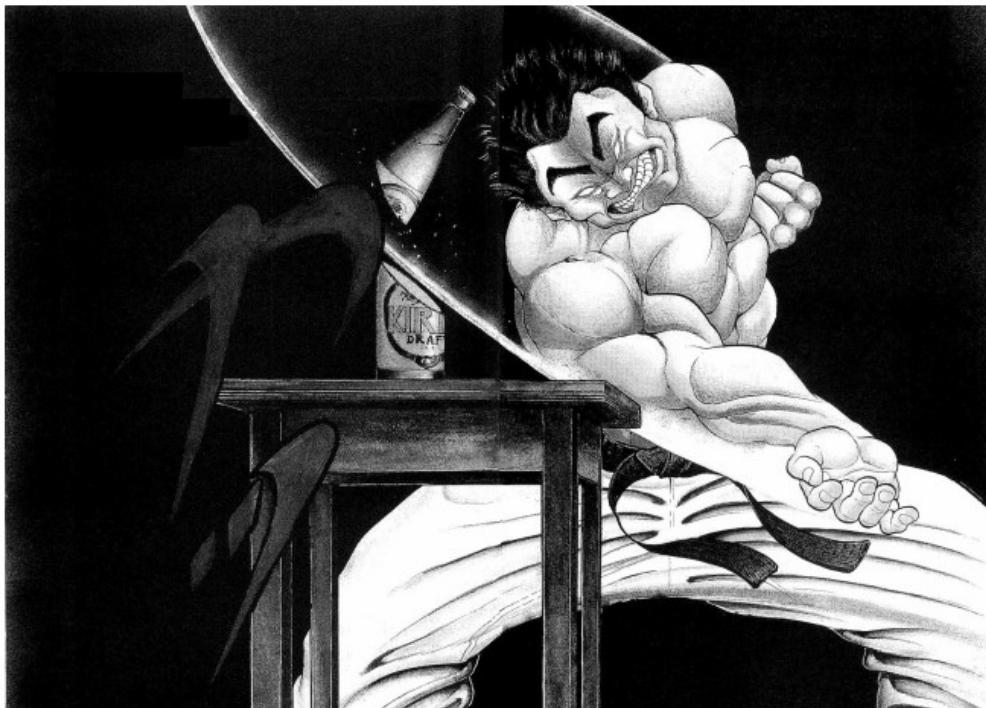
“Tokyo?”

“Tokyo.” said Bunshichi. It didn't really matter how far they had to go, somewhere in that darkness, that man, Kajiwara, would be there.

PART III: THE PAST THE END

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PART IV: INTRUSION CHAPTER I



He was a quiet man, like a cliff. Every part of his body was thick. His head, neck, shoulders, chest, stomach legs, hands and fingers were all fat. His shoulders were fat. His eyes were fat. His nose

was fat. His lips were fat. The dull light that shone from his eyes, was fat. The voice that escaped his lips, was fat.

The one on making himself comfortable on the sofa, held himself as a man with incredible strength. He was there. He wasn't a large man, but he wasn't a small man either. He was around 177 cm tall. A serious attitude radiated from him and hung in the air.

He had a soft smile and a devilish look occasionally flashed across his eyes. Matsuo Shozan. That was his name. He was a hero to those training in Karate all around Japan – no, all around the world. He was the head instructor of the Hokushinkan Karate Dojo.

The Dojos overseas under his name were in the hundreds. Including his schools in Japan, there would be at least 55,000 student in total.

And it was all thanks to Matsuo Shozan. He was in the Dojo master's room at the Hokushinkan main Karate Dojo in Ikebukuro, Tokyo. It was a simple room. There was a huge wooden desk over by the window. It was a sturdy desk. Made from mahogany. That desk was probably the most expensive thing in the room. There were photographs looking down from the wall. One was a photo of Matsuo Shozan fighting a bull when he was in his late 20's. It was taken the precise moment he brought the edge of his fist down on the bull and broke it's horn. It was black and white. The bull, which had jumped into the air, was right in the middle of the photo.

The rug on the floor wasn't especially expensive. The amount of ornaments was surprisingly small.

There was a book shelf near the far wall, with a lounge set sitting in front of it. They only had things they needed in places they need them. When looking at the desk, the sofa and the rug, one could see straight away they weren't part of the same lounge suite, but somehow, in this room, they all seemed to go together.

Matsuo Shozan sat on the sofa listing to another man speaking. The man talking to Shozan had a fine featured face, and was a little taller than Shozan, but not as thick. He had a fair complexion. His finely-kept hair fell down to his shoulders. At a first glance, he could be mistaken for a woman, but of course he wasn't.

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He was wearing a black suit. His lips, which were overly red for a man, along with his white skin and black suit were crisp. It was Himekawa. You could

see the muscles from underneath the fabric of his suit. Shozan had the fingers of both his hands wedged into this knees. They were fat fingers. His fists looked heavy, like weapons. They were fingers that had taken on international Karate masters and martial artists, had had beaten them down. They were bare hands that could kill a man.

“So, Izumi is saying that he doesn't need a visit.”

“Yes.” Himekawa nodded.

“Well, if the doctor says that there is no no need to worry, then there isn't. That man had balls taking on Izumi Souichiro.”

“Tanba Bunshichi.”

“Never heard the name before now.”

“Yes, I suppose you haven't heard his name before, but I have heard a lot of rumors about him.”

“Oh really?”

“He's been going around all kinds of martial arts school and picking fights.”

“Challenging Dojos, eh.”

“Nobody wants to take him on, but those who do,

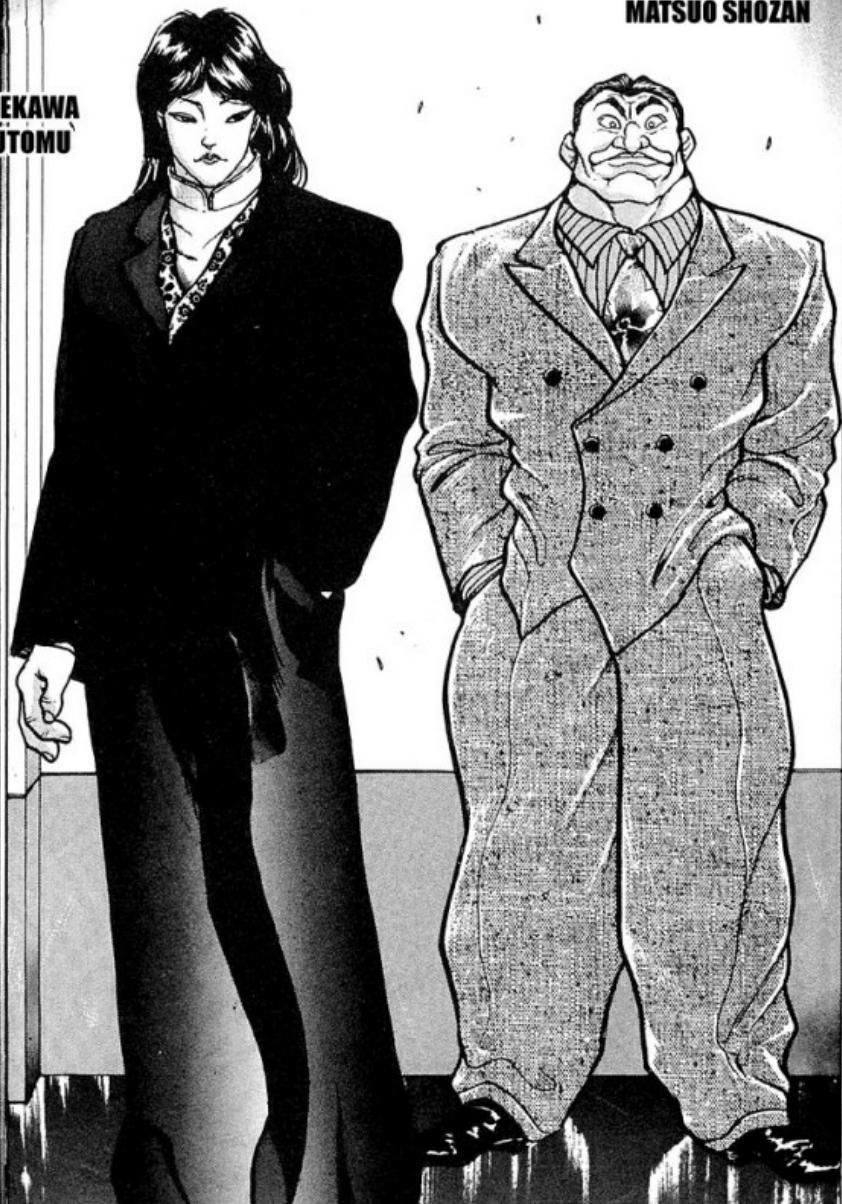
every last one of them, have been beaten.”

“Huh,” Shozan untangled his fingers and crossed his fat arms.

“I had happened to hear some of these rumors in passing, but the first time I met him was the match between him and Mr. Izumi.”

MATSUO SHOZAN

HIMEKAWA
TSUTOMU



“So you saw him fight?”

“He's a very capable man.”

“I wonder if he's going to try and challenge one of my Dojos.”

“Well, he hasn't yet. If he had, you would have been the first to know.”

“While we're on the subject.”

“Yes?”

“The head of our Fukuoka Dojo, Mr. Kawaguchi.”

“What about Mr. Kawaguchi?”

“I heard that he got injured and is laid up in hospital.”

“I see.”

“It seems the cause of those injuries was being beaten by someone.”

“Beaten?”

“There's a rumor that he faced off against someone

in the Dojo and got beaten.”

“Oh.”

“There are only three people other than the head of the Dojo who know about it.”

“I see. If the head of one of our Hokushinkan Dojos, which focus on full contact Karate loses to a challenger, then that puts our reputation in danger.”

“Tanba Bunshichi...” mumbled Shozan.

“You mean the one who beat Kawaguchi was Tanba?”

“I can't say for sure. But after hearing you talk about him, I wonder...”

“ ”
...”

“It seems a mysterious man has appeared on the scene.”

“Indeed.”

“There's a man out there doing all the things I did when I was a young man. He won't stop...” burning light flashed for a moment in Shozan's eyes. “I wonder...” he said, flashing Himekawa with the light from his eyes.

“You wonder?”

“I wonder who would win in a match between you and that Tanba...”

Himekawa took in the glare from Shozan's eyes effortlessly.

“That's difficult to say.”

“Saying is the easy part.”

“I really don't think I could win.”

“You wouldn't win?”

“No,” said Himekawa before lowering his head towards Shozan. “But I don't think I would lose, either.”

“Oh really?”

“That much is certain,” said Himekawa. Shozan unfolded his arms and looked at Himekawa. His eyes looked as if they had just discovered something new and interesting.

“I don't hear that often.”

“...”

“You said you wouldn't win.”

“Yes.” A thick smile formed on Shozan's face as he listened to Himekawa.

“Well that's no good.”

“Indeed...”

“Are you saying that I should be the one to take him on?” said Shozan, laughing a thick laugh, “I would like to get him into one of our tournaments.”

“That would be quite the spectacle.”

“I wonder if he could pull off an unexpected victory.”

“Indeed.”

“By the way, Himekawa, you were saying that Tanba uses some odd techniques.”

“He used moves I had never seen before.”

“Can you remember what they were?”

“Yes.” Shozan rose to his feet as Himekawa answered him.

“Can you try some of his moves on me?”

“I’ll give it a try,” said Himekawa as he too rose to his feet.

He slowly moved behind Shozan and with his left arm and locked Shozan’s left arm behind his back. He wrapped his right arm around Shozan’s face from the side. He then locked Shozan’s right arm near his left shoulder with his right hand, and connected it with his left hand.

“I think it was like this,” said Himekawa before releasing his grip.

“Interesting,” mumbled Shozan as he regained his posture.

“Do you know this move, it’s called the-”

“The Chicken Wing Face Lock.”

“I think Tanba said that’s what someone else was calling it, and -”

“What else did he say about it?”

“He said that he saw it on TV.” Shozan burst out laughing as soon as Himekawa finished speaking.

“What's the matter?” asked Himekawa.

“That's a pro wrestling move.”

“Pro wrestling?”

“I've had it used on me before as well.”

“Really? You too?”

In the past, Shozan had faced off against not only Karate fighters, but a large number of wrestlers as well. Himekawa had just remembered that.

“Was that on TV?”

“Well, even if TV wrestling is a bit of a joke, a Karate fighter using those techniques really is...”

Shozan curled his lips upwards into a grin. For a moment he looked like some kind of wild animal, “very interesting.” Shozan then looked over to Himekawa looking as though he had just remembered something.

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“Hey,” his voice was getting lower, “Shimura and Tsurumi are furious.”

“Those two?”

“Shimura and Tsurumi were staying with Izumi before you were.”

“Oh, I see.”

“Those two are planning to find Tanba and extract their revenge. They showed up here the day that you made your report.”

“...”

“I wonder if we should leave them to it.”

“What did you tell them?”

“I told them to leave him alone. We can't have fights like that, it would just blow everything out of proportion. But maybe sometime in the future...”

Shozan scratched his head as he spoke.

“The future?”

“I mean that in the future, I'll go and take on Tanba myself.”

“Of course.”

“Do you want to know something?”

“What's that?”

“I really love these kinds of fights.”

“You like them?”

“Well, it might be a little soon to say I really like it, I should probably watch my tongue. Really I'm just itching for a fight. I'm starting to regret expanding my business so far.”

“Are you jealous of Tanba?” Shozan didn't answer Himekawa's question, he just sat back down on the sofa.

“The Hokushinkan would never turn down a challenge.” Shozan had a stern look in his eye.

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Himekawa looked up.

“Shimura and Tsurumi, without telling me, have gone around all our Dojo's in the country.”

“All of them?”

“Telling them to get in contact immediately if they come into contact with anyone fitting Tanba's description.”

“And they did this in secret?”

“If they go around all the Dojos doing this, then they know that the news will eventually reach my

ears. I know how much they are willing to put on the line.”

“...”

“If they find that Tanba somewhere, I want to be the first to know.”

“But why?”

“So I can send you out to where ever Tanba is.”

“...”

“I've said that they can't do this. This is important. Do you understand what I'm telling you?”

“...”

“Seems like they are ignoring me. There is no helping it. We can't make a sneak attack. There will be trouble if someone gets killed. It will be up to you to sort out any situation you may find.”

“I understand.”

“And if possible, I want you to bring Tanba back here to me.”

“...”

“I want to have a look at this man,” muttered Matsuo Shozan as he looked at Himekawa.

CHAPTER II

It was raining. The rain was cold. Bunshichi Tanba was standing out in the rain. Raindrops were falling on twigs which lined the path.

[131]

He was standing in front of a ten story building. He was looking up at the third floor. On the window of the third floor were the words 'East-West Pro Wrestling' written in big red lettering.

The shoulders of his leather jacket had turned wet and black with the rain. He was holding a leather bag with his right hand. His bag was worn out. It too was wet with rain. It was caked with mud. The

rain had leaked through his jack and begun to soak his cotton shirt.

“What are you doing standing around in the rain?” asked Ryoji. He was standing next to Bunshichi with his mouth ajar. Hair was matted against his skin. Light shone from his eyes like light reflected from the edge of a knife.

“If you've got some business with East-West Pro Wrestling then hurry up and get in there.” It didn't look like Ryoji's words had gotten into Bunshichi's head, but Bunshichi lowered his vision from the third story window. The entrance to building stood right in front of him. Bunshichi walked through the door without saying a word.

“You moron,” said Ryoji before spitting on to the ground, “Are you going to raid the place?”

“Yep.” said Bunshichi. He ignored the elevator and headed for the stairs.

“Are you for real?”

“Wait here if it's too scary for you.”

“I'm not scared! Not scared of a wrestler, anyway,”
Ryoji spat his words out.

They reached the third floor. The sign for the East-West Pro Wrestling came into sight as climbed the last few steps.

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The lettering was faded and peeling. They found themselves standing in front of that door. Ryoji straightened his back and swallowed loudly.

“This is an office. There won't be any wrestlers here,” said Bunshichi over his shoulder to Ryoji before pushing open the door. The room inside was huge and there were about a dozen office desks lined up next to each other. There were steel book shelves up against the wall. You could see how busy the place was just by looking at it. It seemed

like the kind of place where documents and papers would pile up right in front of you on your desk before you had even finished the job at hand, and keep on piling up.

There were sports news papers piling up on the floor by the wall. There were clippings left all over the place. All the important articles had probably been clipped out and filed away somewhere. One of the book shelves was packed with wrestling magazines. They were old, but well kept they weren't dirty. There were about six people in the office. There was one man with a phone in one had and a pen in the other, feverishly jotting something down.

The first person Bunshichi noticed when he walked through the door was a young woman going about her office work at a table by the door.

“May I help you?” she said, rising to her feet.
“Is Mr. Kawabe here?” asked Bunshichi.

"He is." said the woman, a little anxious.

"Tell him Tanba is here."

"And what is this concerning?" the door behind the young woman flew open as she spoke.

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A giant of man burst out of the door, almost taking it off its hinges. He was a foreigner. He had a thick muscles and a physique that you could tell he was a wrestler just by looking at him. He wore a pair of jeans and a plaid shirt. He was blond. He held a leather ten gallon hat in his hands and had a fierce look on his face. Another man came out of the room after him. He was a little short and dumpy, but he too had the body of a wrestler. He was Japanese. He was wearing a white shirt over black trousers.

The foreigner walked past Bunshichi and put his hand on the door. He opened the door and yelled something over his shoulder. He stunk of liquor.

The man who followed him out of the room answered back. The foreigner had said something along the lines of “Fuck your mother and her pussy too!” The young female receptionist spoke to him as he walked back to his office.

“Mr. Kawabe, this is Mr....”

“Tanba Bunshichi,” said Bunshichi, finishing her sentence for her.

“Tanba?” the man, Kawabe, said as if he was unsure.

“I came to challenge the Dojo.” said Bunshichi. Kawabe's expression slowly changed, showing he had remembered Bunshichi.

“It's you.”

“Do you remember?”

“I remember you.” said Kawabe.

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He smiled. “I thought you might have forgotten.”

“I remember. You were the one that did the best out

of all the people who challenged us.”

Bunshichi nodded and moved forward towards the door, waved to Ryoji as Kawabe told the office lady to get some tea ready. Kawabe went back through the door which was still open. The office was separated from the room by a partition board. There was a desk and a simple lounge set inside.

“Take a seat,” said Kawabe as he sat down. Bunshichi also sat down, looking at Kawabe. The sofa was soft and sagging. It felt as if some very important people had sat there before him.

“Whoa,” he mumbled as he sat down. Kawabe instantly knew what he meant by ‘whoa’.

“That was the foreign wrestler, Crazy Dog.”

“Were you having a dispute over money?”

“Yeah, he came to complain about his salary,” Kawabe looked up at Ryoji, who had a difficult look on his face, as he spoke.

“You can sit down,” he said. Ryoji finally took a

seat next to Bunshichi.

“Are you his son?”

“No,” said Ryoji, “I’m his best student.”

“Oh really?” said said Kawabe, raising his voice.

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“You’re taking on students?”

“He’s not my student. He’s just following me around,” replied Bunshichi. Kawabe looked both Bunshichi and Ryoji over for a moment, smiled and sighed.

“Honestly, those foreign wrestlers are a pain in the ass.”

“Like that man just now?”

“Yeah. He found out we were paying him less than Hammer Shin, and came in here demanding a high wage.”

“...”

“Basically, Shin is a second tier wrestler and has less experience than him. But this isn’t America. Shin draws a better crowd. This is Japan. Those

guys know how to wrestle, but they are too unpredictable. It's no good.”

“I see.”

“We don't need wrestlers who are going to jump in the ring drunk. They always talk about jumping ship to another wrestling branch, but I just tell them to fuck off and do it.”

“Really...”

“They are so full of themselves. I told him he can face off against Shin in the cement, and if he beats him, then he will get his pay rise. After I said that he shut right up and went home. There aren't many wrestlers who have the courage to take on Shin in the cement. They know their own limitations.”

“The cement?”

“Like the matches that our Kajiwara does.”

Kawabe got a nostalgic look in his eyes. “How many years ago was it now?”

“Six.”

“Has it already been that long...”

“You're looking in good shape.”

“Thanks. The Dojo isn't there anymore.”

“In Shinjuku?”

“Yeah.”

“So no one is at the Dojo anymore.”

“Well no one on this planet likes being around a bunch of loud mouths, or being thrown into fights when you're nearly forty. I work in an office now. Sometimes I'm appear on TV as a commentator.”

“...”

“Those foreign wrestlers give me nothing but grief.” Just as Kawabe had finished talking, the receptionist came through the door with a tray of tea. He continued talking once she had left. “So what are you here for?”

“Same thing as always.”

“You've come to challenge the Dojo?”

“You could say that.”

“You've filled out quite a bit. Have you come to join up?” Said Kawabe without a hint of sarcasm.

“Can I join up?”

“There are some regulations. There is an age limit, you know.”

“..”

“But, you know, you're a lot stronger now than you were then, so I'd say you joining up would be a possibility. I could put in a good word with the boss for you, and he'd have to see you first...”

“See me?”

“You wouldn't be able to do a main event. But your name definitely has value. But you would still have to start as a junior. Even so, we've already got plenty of wrestlers.

“Is Kajiwara one those wrestlers?”

“He is.”

“Could you tell me something.”

“What?”

“Six years ago. Out of all the young wrestlers there, where was Kajiwara, in terms of strongest to weakest?”

“..”

“You can tell me now, can't you?”

“He was at the top, the strongest,” said Kawabe.

Bunshichi smiled.

“Does that put your mind at rest?”

“It sure does.”

“Even so, our juniors are juniors.”

“I understand.”

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“These guys are a little different to the others. And they have gotten even stranger since then.”

“Like how?”

“They have been really into kicks. They can get their legs up like a Karate fighter. You know about Matsuo don't you?”

“Of the Hokushinkan?”

“They would have taken you on when you were younger, though your grappling probably would have needed some work.”

“I guess so”

“Even Matsuo has shown and interest in our Kajiwara, telling him to quit pro-wrestling and join the Hokushinkan, saying all kinds of things.”

“But why Matsuo Shozan?”

“Pro wrestling Dojos often gets a lot of people challenging them. Like you.”

“..”

“They are not normally anything special. But there was one who came in who no one could lay a finger on, and who walked out of the ring himself...” said Kawabe, looking at Bunshichi to see if he knew who it was. “That was Matsuo Shozan.”

“Matsuo...”

“There are a lot of complex grappling moves that both Pro Wrestling and Matsuo have.”

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After the spoke, Kawabe narrowed his eyes as if a dark light had come from Bunshichi's eyes. A pang of fear shot through Kawabe's body. There was a brief silence.

“I haven't told you about the conditions,” said Kawabe, his voice had grown firm.

“Tell me if there are any,” said Bunshichi in a low

voice.

“The conditions for joining up?”

“No,” said Bunshichi, his expression hadn’t changed. Ryoji swallowed loudly, and it echoed through the room.

“I came here to challenge the Dojo again,” said Bunshichi, speaking slowly and clearly so that Kawabe would understand exactly what he was saying.

CHAPTER III

[page 138 continued]

There was a long silence. That silence was spent by Bunshichi and Kawabe glaring at each other. Ryoji looked over both of their faces as he realized

the change in atmosphere. Kawabe was the first to open his mouth.

“You're serious, aren't you?”

“I am.”

“Didn't you learn your lesson?”

“I learned a lot. That's why I've been training.”

“Against Kajiwara?”

“That's right.” Bunshichi answered bluntly. “I'm not interested in anyone else.”

Kawabe titled his head slightly to the side as he glared over at Bunshichi.

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“That's not possible.”

“Not possible?”

“Kajiwara isn't the same as he used to be.”

“I'm not the same as I used to be.”

“I get that.”

“Then why?”

“Kajiwara is now a pro-wrestler with a pay check.”

“ ”
...
“ ”

“There is no way he can face off against an amateur.”

“ ”
...
“ ”

“It doesn't really matter how strong you are now, you're still at amateur level. You have no pulling power, no one knows you. There would be nothing in it for Kajiwara, even if he won. Not for him, or for me. If he lost, on the other hand, it could put a lot of people out of work.”

“I'm not saying I want to fight him in the ring.”

“It doesn't make a difference. The media will sniff out the rumor. Even if Kajiwara wins but sustains an injury would be bad for us and our company. And of course for Kajiwara.”

“ ”
...
“ ”

“I think you understand what I'm trying to tell you...” said Kawabe in a comforting manner, not trying to be antagonistic. Bunshichi looked down for the first time.

There was a long silence. After a while, Bunshichi

slowly started to speak. His voice sounded like it was about to spew forth from his guts like goo.

“Look, Kawabe,” he said, raising his head, “Six years. I have waited six years, to have a rematch with Kajiwara.”

“...”

“Three years ago I finally built up the courage to take Kajiwara on again. But he wasn't even in Japan.”

[140]

“.....”

“I saw him on TV. I was in Nara. He had already come back to Japan.”

Kawabe didn't answer.

“He was caught up in his business, and I in mine. The world isn't always a logical place.”

Kawabe crossed his arms and remained silent. He looked at Bunshichi with sympathetic eyes.

Bunshichi looked back at him.

“I pissed blood,” mumbled Bunshichi, “I have

been thinking about that fight with Kajiwara all this time." Bunshichi didn't go into just how far he had gone in his training. He didn't have to, Kawabe could tell how much he had trained just by looking at him. Kawabe had told Bunshichi that he needed to bulk up a little the first time they met.

At that time Bunshichi thought that he had the ideal body. It had gone past what would be called an ideal body and was now in a league of its own. His body was heavy, like a blunt weapon. But it was a blunt weapon with a lot of power. Kawabe now saw the man sitting in front of him in a new light. He looked even more impressive now than when he walked through the door. A strange kind of pressure came from Bunshichi's body as he sat on the sofa. He was a rough weapon of a man. He seemed even more powerful than the foreign wrestler who had just stormed out of the office.

There was just no way Kawabe could let this man fight Kajiwara. "I can't let that happen," said Kawabe.

"You wouldn't tell me where Kajiwara is even if I asked, right?"

"That's right," Kawabe said with a nod.

"I guess I will have to do it myself," said Bunshichi as he rose to his feet. Ryoji shot to his feet as well.

"I could fight you in place of Kajiwara, how does that sound?" said Kawabe as he too stood up. Bunshichi, who was about to turn his back on Kawabe, stopped in his tracks.

"What was it you said to me six years ago? That I have to do it with you?" Kawabe nodded slowly.

"Let me tell you what you told me."

"..."

"You won't beat me."

"You won't know if you don't try," said Kawabe in a stern voice.

"That's what I told you back then," muttered

Bunshichi.

“Yes, it was,” said Kawabe, the subtle wrinkles of a smile forming on his face.

“But you do know, don’t you?”

“...”

“I would win,” said Bunshichi. They stared at each other for a few seconds. Bunshichi turned his back on Kawabe.

“I know,” said Kawabe, his words hitting Bunshichi’s back.

[142]

Bunshichi looked over his shoulder. “You can’t protect Kajiwara. Every day of the year”

“I can’t allow you fight Kajiwara, but I guess I can’t stop you from fighting him either. It can’t be helped.”

“...”

“All I ask is that when you do face him, fight him properly, no weapons.”

“Alright.”

“However, and it's got nothing to do with me, but you'll never beat Kajiwara the way he is now.”

“All I can do is try.”

“You know, Kajiwara himself might decline.”

“There is no man who will sit back and silently take a beating.”

“He's not the same man he once was.”

“Neither am I.”

“He can break bones now.” Kawabe spoke loud and clear so that Bunshichi would hear him.

Kawabe held his hand out to Bunshichi. Bunshichi looked at Kawabe. Kawabe held his hand out in silence. Bunshichi slowly held his hand out while looking at Kawabe. Their hands were on top of one another. In that moment, an unspoken attack had begun. What kind of attack wasn't clear to Ryoji.

The both grabbed the others right elbow with their left hand while their right hands were still grasping each other, and looked like each was trying to flip the other over. The table broke. In that moment

Kawabe had Bunshichi on his back. That's when he heard a cracking sound.

[143]

The unnerving sound echoed through the room. It was Kawabe who let out a cry. Bunshichi released his grip on Kawabe's hand. Kawabe's index finger was bent to the side from its center joint.

“Mr. Kawabe...” the door opened and several men poured into the room. They were office workers, not pro wrestlers, called “the suits” in the wrestling world.

“Do you get it now?” he laughed. It was a bitter laugh. “I can break bones as well.” Kawabe wiped the sweat from his brow and grabbed at his right hand with his left hand. Bunshichi faced the door. The suits parted ways like the red sea.

“Don't do it!” Kawabe called out to Bunshichi as

he made his way to the door. "You'll regret it! You'll make yourself an enemy of the East-West Pro Wrestling federation."

Bunshichi silently made his way through the door.

CHAPTER IV

Grey darkness spread out from the window. It was a huge window. The polished glass reached from the ceiling to the floor. It was a bar up near the penthouse in a group of high rises in Shinjuku. The darkness outside spread over the land for 200 meters.

Not even a smidgen of the coldness made it through the glass. Finely tuned air conditioned warmth filled the room. Once the air had struggled it's way through the air conditioner, it lost its dampness and gained an inorganic smell. It had lost all of the smells that air should have, like rain, plants, exhaust gas and dirt. It was the kind of air that dried out your skin.

The lights of the city below shone in the dark. They looked like glow worms on the bottom of an ocean of darkness. They were so far away that you couldn't really see them individually, rather they shone with beautiful multi-colored light. That's what it looked like at a distance, through the thick, hardened glass. The warmth from inside gently fell to the ground once it made it through the window. Looking out at the world made you feel as if you were looking down on some different planet from above. The lights of the city looked like stars floating in space.

The room was filled with subtle music and the smell of tobacco. The music was an old jazz number. It was a strange, dimly lit bar, with the music and the low noise not quite matching it. There was a man and a woman sharing a quiet conversation. The sound of someone touching the glass. Noises like that melted into the room.

There were a few foreigners there. A man sat down at the end of the polished bar. He had his chest puffed outwards and was thick with muscle. He wore a blue shirt under an open navy blue blazer. The sleeves of his shirt were sticking out from under the sleeves of his blazer. He was wearing them in a casual manner, but they looked pretty expensive.

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He somehow looked out of place in and among all the men in suits and dressed up ladies. His body was a bit big, but what really made him stand out

was his hair. He was blond. He was strikingly blond, and his facial hair was black. He was Japanese. He had died his hair. The window was to the left of him. He raised a glass of bourbon to his lips as he gazed out of the window. He was in his early forties, forty five at the most. He had a scars running all over his chin like a ditch. Some of the scars still looked pink and fresh. The fingers gripping the glass of bourbon on the counter were incredibly thick. He was the only one sitting at the counter.

A man walked into the room alone. He was as big as any other man in that room. He wore a worn lather jumper over a pair of washed-out jeans. It was Bunshichi Tanba. He walked over to the bar and looked around. His eyes soon stopped on the man sitting at the edge of the bar. He slowly made his way over. He moved his body carefully, so as not to give himself away. Bunshichi sat down next to the man. The man looked up to see who it was that had ignored the other seats and purposely

decided to sit next to him. He took a look and saw Bunshichi's body, but quickly lost interest and looked back out the window.

[146]

The pair of them looked like a small mountain of flesh from behind. Weapons made from flesh and wrapped in fabric.

“I'll have what he's having,” Bunshichi said as he looked down at the glass the man next to him and then glanced up at the lone waiter behind the bar. The bartender instantly knew what he wanted. Bunshichi again spoke to the bartender as he began to pour his drink.

“Some beef jerky, too.”

A glass full of bourbon appeared in front of him. The beef jerky he had ordered with it appeared next to it a moment later. Bunshichi grabbed the

glass and poured about a third of it down into his stomach. It was straight bourbon. No water added.

The warmth of the Bourbon spread from his mouth down to the pit of his throat. Bunshichi slowly returned his glass to the counter. It was a small, thick glass. It had a design that looked as though it had been cut up with a knife.

“What do you want?” asked the man. He still had his back turned and was still looking out of the window into darkness. He spoke almost as if he was speaking to himself.

“You're Mr. Date, right?” Bunshichi didn't speak those words to the man, but rather into his glass of Bourbon. The other man looked up from the window. The man's blond hair was right in front of his nose. He didn't say anything. There was a strange kind of power that followed him as he turned around and looked at Bunshichi.



The sense of his muscles pushed through his clothes and hung in the air.

“I’m Tanba Bunshichi.”

“And what do you want?” said the man looking back out the window.

“There is something I want to ask Date Ushio, the mighty Ox.”

“...” the man, Date, didn’t answer. He simply brought his glass of bourbon up to his lips as he looked out the window.

“I heard that you would be staying in this hotel from the editor of a pro wrestling magazine.”

“We stay here every time we’re in a show in Tokyo,” said Date, “us foreigners,” he added in a low voice.

“Foreigners?”

“They consider me a foreigner. Under the contract I

have with East-West pro-wrestling.” Date put his glass back down on the counter. He slowly turned and looked at Bunshichi. Their eyes met. Bunshichi looked at his eyes, a deep dark light seemed to shine from within them.

“Do you know why I’m in this bar?”

“I heard that you don’t like going out much. I’ve been in and out of all the bars in this hotel looking for you.”

“Huh,” he muttered and half turned back towards Bunshichi. The chair swiveled underneath Date as he turned his body and it made a metallic grinding sound.

“Well, what do you want?”

“I want you to tell me something,” said Bunshichi, not taking his eyes off Date. His line of sight came down on Bunshichi like an axe.

only look him in the eye for no more than a few seconds at a time.

“Tell you what?” said Date, growing a little impatient.

“Tell me how to break in.”

“Break in?” said Date, there was now a little power behind his voice.

“Break in,” Bunshichi said again. That was followed by a brief silence.

“Are you crazy?”

“I may be crazy, but I’m serious.”

“Seriously?” if they weren’t in a bar he would have screwed up his face as if about to spit something out.

“Who are you? You don’t look like an amateur,” said Date, his voice had grown a little thick. The voice was rough, like it had over flowed from his throat. He slowly looked Bunshichi up and down.

“I’m a wanderer.”

“I could tell that just by looking at you when you walked in the door. But that’s not what I’m asking you,” his voice was strangely calm, “I want to

know why.”

“There is a man who I really want to fight.”

“Who?”

“Kajiwara,” said Bunshichi. A different kind of light shone in Date's eyes.

“You're the one who broke Kawabe's finger.”

“So you have heard of me.”

“Oh, I heard. I heard there was some fool who wants to take on Kajiwara.”

[149]

“Well then I don't need to explain myself.”

“No, I think you do. Why did you come and see me?”

“...”

“I might be getting paid by the East-West Pro-wrestling federation, but my name isn't on their register. Even though I'm not, I still don't like people who try to mess with them.”

“I'm not trying to mess with them. I even told Kawabe that.”

“Well then are you trying to mess with me?”

“...”

“The federation would probably give me a bonus if I did you in right here and tossed you through that window.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“I thought you had a grudge against the federation, against The Great Tatsumi,” said Bunshichi.

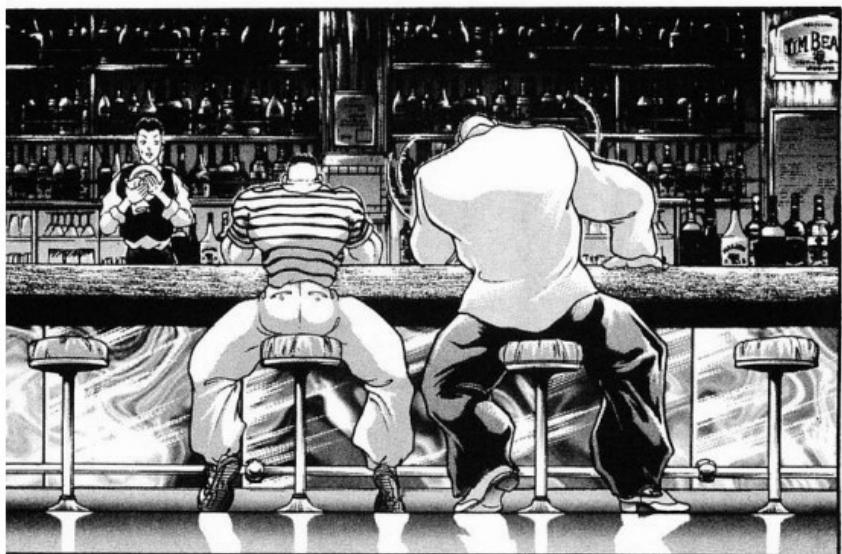
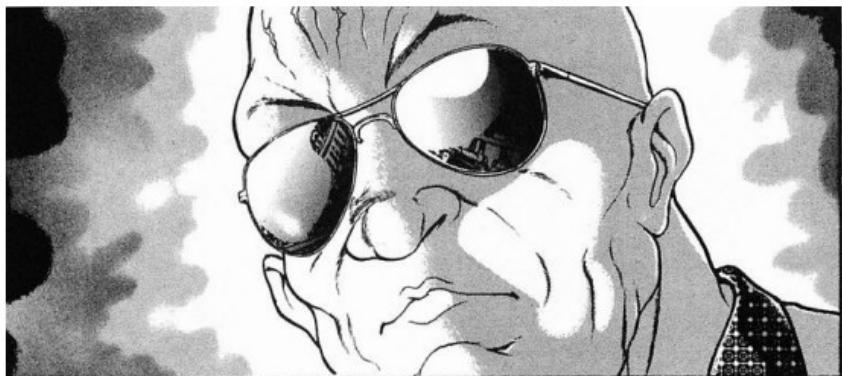
“A grudge?”

“Weren't you the reason that he jumped ship to the Central Pro-Wrestling circuit?” Bunshichi put an odd emphasis on the word 'you'. As soon as he had finished speaking, Date tensed his entire body. He was intimidating.

“Seems like Tatsumi's coup is pretty famous in this business. You weren't there when Tatsumi's made plans after making his coup. But it seems that you tipped them off before it even happened, and that's why it all blew up. He was chased by the Central Wrestling Federation and formed the East West Wrestling Federation.”

“ ”
...
“ ”

“By the way, what broke down at the Central Wrestling Federation was its main event, you. So you decided to go overseas to avoid having to start from the bottom in the East West Wrestling Federation. It seems that Tatsumi is calling you out as a traitor.”



“I don't know where you heard all that, but you shouldn't go running your mouth.”

“And now you're receiving money from the Great Tatsumi.”

“Don't push it.” Date's muscles tensed under his blazer.

“I read about it in a book about pro wrestling.” said Bunshichi, his tone suddenly turning a little more polite.

“What the hell would know?”

“Nothing...”

“...”

“You shouldn't believe everything you read. There is no way we have been living in a world as fantastic as all of that. The story always changes depending on the opinion and position of who's telling the story. Everybody thinks they know it all.”

“...”

“It's just that the papers take more notice of what

Tatsumi is saying than you.”

“I certainly do hate that guy, but there is a world out there that only wrestlers really understand.”

There came a cracking sound from between Date's fingers as he finished speaking. A crack had formed in his thick whiskey glass.

“Shit.” Date looked at his right hand. A shard of glass had wedged itself in around the base of his thumb. Blood dripped from the point where it was pulled out.

[151]

Date licked it up with his tongue.

“Are you alright?” asked the bartender when he noticed the blood.

“I'm fine,” said Date. The bartender brought over a first aid kit/box, but Date told him he didn't need it as he wrapped a handkerchief around it. People around him had noticed too.

'That is Date the Ox', 'He's a pro-wrestler', 'He's the one who fights those fixed matches' came the

low voices from behind him.

"I guess those wrestlers really do get a surprise when they bleed for real," came a voice from right behind the pair. It was the same voice that had mentioned fixed matches. Date stood up.

"Who said that?" he said, surprisingly blunt. He glared at the tables behind him. In one of the seats sat a middle aged man in a suit. There was with a woman with him who was all dressed up. They didn't look like a husband and wife. It looked more like they had come to relax at the bar before heading up to their hotel room for some fun.

The man's face was red. He'd had a bit to drink. Date's eyes were glaring straight at him.

"It was you," said Date.

"What are you talking about?" said the man. The man looked about the same age as Date, but there was a world of difference between their physiques.

"What did you say just now?"

"You mean the fixed matches?" said the man, his voice trembling slightly, "All I did was tell the truth." All the man could think about is whether or not Date would lash out of him in the bar of a hotel with all these people watching. There were women present as well. A wrestler would get temporarily banned from matches if they were found attacking members of the public.

Without saying a word, Date moved in front of their table.

"Sir!" the bartender called out.

"It's nothing," said Date. He held his forehead in his left hand. He held the shard of glass that he had pulled from his right hand a moment ago. He pushed the shard of glass into his forehead, around where his hairline ended. He had a lot of power built up in that hand. A small sound echoed through the silence that had returned to the table. There were tearing and scraping sounds. Date had

stabbed the shard of glass into his forehead and pulled it downwards. The redness in the man's face began to turn pale.

The woman gasped. A deep red line in Date's face grew bigger as he pulled the glass downward. Date put his face right in front of the man at the table. The red line had flowed down the side of his nose and into his lips.

[153]

Before the red could build up around his lips, Date's huge pink tongue crawled out of his mouth and mopped up the excess blood. The woman let out a cry and rose to her feet. The man tried to stand up as well but his knees struck the underside of the table. The glass of wine sitting on the table got knocked over and the red wine stained the table cloth a deep red.

“Y-You...” The calmness of the man had been completely torn away. He stood up and pointed

with his wine-stained, trembling finger. Date spoke before the bartender, who had come out from behind the counter, had a chance to open his mouth. “It’s nothing,” said Date with a deathly piercing voice, “I’m the one who’s hurt. These two are fans of mine, I came over to say hello, but when I touched my face the glass from the cup was still lodged in my finger. I think I shocked my fans a little bit. It’s my fault, really,” he said, looking at the man with a smirk. The man nodded earnestly. “You’d better clean all of this up,” said Date as he dropped his blood splattered cup into the bartenders hands, turned back towards Bunshichi and smiled with a mouth of crimson. “Where can I wash up?” asked Date. The bartender pointed to the far side of the bar.

“We don’t have anything more to talk about. So just disappear before I get back,” said Date looking in Bunshichi’s direction. The muscles in Dates body had swelled even more than before. It seemed they had swelled along with the bleeding. His voice

had become calm.

Just as Date had disappeared towards the washroom, a voice came from the entrance of the bar.

“Bro!”

[154]

The patrons of the bar looked over with piercing eyes as Kubo Ryoji entered the room. Ryoji thought the types of people who come to bars like this one to be nothing other than mortal enemies. It seems that Ryoji, in a pair of jeans, stuck out even more than Bunshichi. Even if he wasn't young, a weaker willed person would have been pushed out of the bar by its atmosphere alone. Facing the atmosphere, there came a feeling like someone wanted to kill you which ran right through the body.

“Bro, I finally found you.” Ryoji stood next to

Bunshichi at the bar and spoke in a low voice.

“What's happened?”

“There are some guys looking for you in the lobby.”

“What?”

“Just like I said, they are waiting in the lobby. There were just two of them. Strange guys. They asked me about you.”

“What did they ask?”

“They asked where you were. I had to answer them, but I told them I didn't know where you were.”

“What kind of men where they?”

“They were Karate fighters. They had Karate blisters all over their hands. They looked like two rabid dogs.”

“Karate fighters, huh.”

“They are out to get someone, I got really bad feeling about them. Do you know anyone like that?”

“Too many to count.”

“I pretended that I need to go to the toilet. I think I

lost them.”

“I wonder,” said Bunshichi.

“You wonder? What are you talking about?”

[155]

Bunshichi's line of sight was set squarely behind Ryoji.

“If those guys over there are the Karate fighters you were talking about, then you didn't lose them, rather you led them right to me.”

Ryoji's eyes swung upwards. He looked behind himself. There were three men standing at the doorway.

“It's them.” Ryoji felt a burning sensation from deep within himself.

“So there were three of them.”

“Damn it,” spat Ryoji.

Two of them had threatened Ryoji, but Ryoji hadn't seen the third one. They had tailed him. They had that intention when they first called out to Ryoji. It

looked like Ryoji had accepted it. The trio slowly made their way over to Bunshichi. You could see their muscles rippling beneath their shirts and trousers as they walked.

The three men stood around Bunshichi, as if he were wrapped up by them. They weren't too close, nor were they far away. They were far away enough that Bunshichi wouldn't be able to punch or kick them, but also close enough that Bunshichi wouldn't be able to make a break for it.

“Bunshichi Tanba, right?” Said one of the men. Bunshichi nodded. All the eyes in the bar were on Bunshichi and the three men. The man and woman from before, who had been sitting at the table, were gone. There was a strange air that focused itself around Bunshichi.

“Please, you are disturbing the other customers...” said the bartender.

“We'll be leaving soon,” said Bunshichi.

A pair of eyes glared down at Bunshichi.

“What?” asked a throaty voice. Date had returned from the washrooms. He stood behind the three men. He had a blood soaked handkerchief wrapped around his right hand and a piece of cloth the same color as his shirt wrapped around his forehead. The sleeve of his shirt no longer poked out from under the right hand sleeve of his blazer.

“They're with me, please don't worry about it.”

“Really?” said Date as he sat back down in his seat.

“Could we please speak with you outside?” said one of the men.

“Before we do that, why don't you tell me who you are.” One of the men opened his mouth after hesitating for just a moment.

“We're from the Hokushinkan. I'm Matsumoto,” he said.

“Ikami.”

“Gotou,” the three men gave their names.

“The Hokushinkan?”

“Kawaguchi from Fukuoka, and you must have also faced off against Mr. Izumi in Nara.

“I certainly did,” answered Bunshichi in a low voice. The three men suddenly became stiff, tensed up.

“This time I want you to take on the challenge of the three of us,” said Matsumoto, his voice was hard as stone.

“Challenge?”

“That's right.”

“Right now?”

“There is a park quite near here.”

“Alright.” Bunshichi stood up.

[157]

“Hey!” Date called out after Bunshichi. He looked back towards the counter, the glass was still turned over.

“You'd better pay for the booze you drank...”
Bunshichi pulled a crisp 5 thousand yen note from his pocket and casually placed it down on the

counter.

“Let's go.” Matsumoto, Ikami and Gotou all followed after Bunshichi as he walked towards the door.

CHAPTER V

It was a quiet park surrounded by trees. So quiet you wouldn't think there there is a road carrying a constant stream of cars nearby.

Towering skyscrapers stood behind the branches of cherry blossom trees. Bunshichi was standing in the dirt. He had taken off his jacket.

His muscles were wrapped up with the cloth of his t-shirt. His legs were like tree trunks and pulled at the denim of his jeans. They weren't made for someone who needed to lift their legs high or give

their joints a free range of movement. He had on a pair of leather work shoes. The three men standing in front of him weren't as muscly as Bunshichi, but they had fearless looks on their faces. They had builds not unlike frightening gangsters. Frightening may be frightening, but that was a part of the Yakuza. However there was also a certain something that put them apart from regular people. It wasn't like they had tempered and conditioned their bodies, more like their physique was something they were born with.

[158]

They gave off the same kind of tension as seeing a weapon which is made to kill people. There was a single street light that illuminated Bunshichi and the three men in the darkness. The three men would have been around three or four years younger than Bunshichi, in their late twenties. Matsumoto looked the strongest.

It was early spring but the evening air was still cold. Ryoji was standing a little off to the side. He was wearing a leather jacket with the sleeves rolled up. The sounds of cars tooting their horns and engines humming drifted into the park. Those kinds of sounds were to be expected, but they sounded so far away that they didn't even seem real.

They hadn't closed in on each other close enough to make a punch or a kick. A few more steps would have to be taken for that to happen.

"Three on one, huh?" said Bunshichi. It didn't particularly look as if Bunshichi was worried about a three on one match. He was just standing there wondering who he would take on first. Bunshichi was standing there with his legs casually ajar, his body seemed very stable. He lightly moved his elbows around and put more tension into his body. It was a fighting stance without being a fighting stance. The tension could be felt

coming off of Bunshichi which made it look like he had taken a fighting stance.

“Who's first?” asked Matsumoto.

“Any one of you,” said Bunshichi. Matsumoto grinned.

“Well then, how about we go three on one then.”

The three had given their names and Bunshichi had accepted their challenge. That's what Bunshichi had done. It was unexpected, but seemed to be unraveling into a typical match. Bunshichi wouldn't mind taking on all three if need be.

[159]

Even if they all came at him at once, that would still be within the rules of the fight. The three of them showed their worth when they agreed to fight as part of the Hokushinkan, which teaches full contact Karate. Winning would be a true virtue. It would be real underground Karate.

That's the way that Matsumoto would want to do it.

"That's dirty," mumbled Ryoji.

"Alright, but then I won't go easy on you," said Bunshichi. He looked at Matsumoto to the right, Ikami in the middle and Gotou on the left. Even if they weren't the head of their respective classes, they looked like they could be strong enough to do so. They also weren't the type of Karate fighters who pulled their punches. From paired karate-kata to hitting the body. The two or three centimeters that the non-contact karate fighter stopped at wouldn't be enough for full contact karate. You could use it in amateur Karate, but if your opponent was an experienced fighter, one centimeter could mean the difference between a victory and a loss.

Not only strength, but fear also allowed to you make steps forward. But the person standing in front of Bunshichi was not that kind of opponent. Matsumoto and Gotou suddenly moved out to the side, leaving Ikami in the middle. That's when it

happened. Bunshichi moved to the right like a black gust of wind. He closed in on Matsumoto by a few steps. His movement was a surprise to his opponents that were neither ready to take or make an attack. The moment you make a single move it is too late to make a separate move. It takes a certain amount of time. And in that time they came even closer to Bunshichi.

[160]

When they did, Bunshichi's fist went flying straight into Matsumoto's face. Matsumoto went flying backwards without making a sound. He fell face down with his mouth still open, and his eyes still open, knocked out cold.

Matsumoto had tried to get a kick in before he got hit, but his poor timing and lack of balance meant that there was no need to try and block it. The feeling of smashed muscle and cracked bone ran through Bunshichi's hand. If a Karate fighter had

kept his distance and faced the enemy, the fist attack would be a kick, not a punch. The leg has a better reach and can hit an opponent from further away than the arm. They almost never get a punch as the first attack. That's why Bunshichi decided to use his fists.

“Guuh...”

Bunshichi turned to Ikami, who had gotten ready to join the fight, bent his body over and let his leg fly. Bunshichi did this almost at the same time as he punched Matsumoto, as if it were a single move. Bunshichi's leg, with all his weight behind it, sunk itself into Ikami's mid-section. His foot had the power to split Ikami's abdomen apart. Ikami's legs flew up in the air as he flew backwards. Bunshichi tightened his arm movements, clenched his fists and turned to face Gotou. That was enough to stop Gotou in his tracks.

A thick crimson began to form in Matsumoto's

mouth. Blood from his nose was running down both sides of his face and form a pool on the ground. Ikami was on the ground, making some kind of noise, almost like he was saying a prayer. The contents of his stomach was coming out of his mouth.

[161]

A sour smell filled the night air. Gotou didn't move. He had turned pale.

“Why are you coming after me?” Asked Bunshichi. Gotou didn't answer. Bunshichi suddenly remember the long hair man who had been with him when he fought Souichiro. Himekawa for the Hokushinkan. Izumi had introduced him.

“Did someone tell you something?”

“No,” said Gotou as he moved back slowly so as to get out of the line of fire. Bunshichi moved towards him as he moved back. He wasn't getting any further away.

“We were just looking for you. And when we found you, we were supposed to report back to the head office.” Then without any warning, they had planned to sort it out all by themselves. Beads of sweat had formed on Gotou's brow. Still in a fighting stance, Bunshichi moved back from Gotou. “We should probably call it quits, huh?” said Bunshichi, “I can't go and do over the only guy who can look after these two, or else I'll have to call the ambulance myself.” Bunshichi continued to put more distance between them and relaxed from his fighting stance. Gotou felt all the power drain from his body. Bunshichi hadn't even broken a sweat.

“Let's go,” he yelled over to Ryoji. “That was awesome!” Ryoji finally answered back, “You totally wasted the Hokushinkan!” he went on, too excited to conceal his voice. Bunshichi turned his back on him and began making his way over to the entrance of the park. “Wait! Hey bro, wait for me!”

Ryoji followed after Bunshichi. From the shadows cast by the cherry bloom tree's branches above, an even bigger shadow emerged right in front of Bunshichi.

“That was really something,” said the shadow. It had cloth wrapped around its head. Standing right before him was the same man he had talked to in the bar, Date.

“You were watching?” said Bunshichi, stopping to look at Date.

“Yeah, I took a peek.”

“But it had nothing to do with you?” said Bunshichi. Date turned his head a fraction to the side before he answered.

“I heard it was about the Hokushinkan”

“Hokushinkan?”

“Yeah, it seems as if you've made an enemy of them.”

“They're not my enemy.”

“Yeah, but they don't think so.”

“...”

“Taking those guys on one by one with Matsumoto being the last opponent would have made things a little harder,” said Date with a wry grin, “Taking them all on at once, letting them think they have the upper hand before smashing them, you've got balls, that's for sure.”

“You guys are the ones with the monopoly on hitting before the bell,” Said Bunshichi. Date let out a laugh.

“You're funny, you know that?”

“No, that's first time I've been called funny.”

“I like guys like you.”

“Do you now?”

“I just want to ask you one thing?”

“...”

“Why do you wan to fight Kajiwara? Is it the money? You think you'll sell out a stadium if you beat him?

“Nope.”

“Nope?”

“I just want to fight him.”

“Yeah, but why?”

“I lost once to Kajiwara. He grappled me and made me scream. I can still hear the sound I made.” A dark flame smoldered in Bunshichi's eyes as he spoke.

“Vendetta?”

“You could call it that.”

“You're a strange one.”

“I just have a simple motive.”

“I fight for money. I got into Sumo wrestling to feed myself, keep my gut full. I got into pro-wrestling because I wanted money.”

“I heard you were a top-tier wrestler.”

“Yeah, but you're the type who would become a wrestler if there was money in it or not,” said Date as he glanced at Bunshichi.

“...”

“And so is Kajiwara. Maybe even more so than

you.”

“Kajiwara?”

“Yeah, like you, he can't stand the existence of anyone stronger than himself. In that kind of was, he's even more intense than you.”

“You don't say.”

“Yeah, I'm not even sure I think he's from this planet. Pro wrestling isn't that far removed from a regular business. Only the truly great people stick out.”

“Kajiwara is truly great then?”

“I'd say so. I want to ask you one more thing.”

“What?”

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“About what you said before. You want to jump in the ring with Kajiwara, don't you?”

“To fight him, yeah.”

“Amateurs can't just jump into the ring.”

“I'm not an amateur.”

“You're an amateur in the world of pro wrestling.

Though you could be pretty good for the ratings.”

“Storming the ring?”

“Yeah.”

“Do they have pre-match meeting about this or something?”

“In a sense.”

“In a sense?”

“There are times when they do have a proper pre-match meeting, but sometimes they don't.

Sometimes the only person who knows about it is the one storming the ring, but there are other times when the guy in the ring knows what's coming.”

“...”
“...”

“There are times when the promoter organizes to have someone storm the ring. For money.

Sometimes it helps to sell more tickets. And there are some that storm the ring to try and make some money for themselves as a wrestler. But regardless of why you want to jump in the ring, there are rules in place.”

“Really?”

“For example, regardless of how you do it, the

promoter needs to be told about it.”

“The promoter?”

“Yeah, to tell if it's going to make any money or not.”

“...”

“It will be something you need to discuss. Whether the punters will be interested in it or not.”

“The style...” said Bunshichi.

“Yeah. Whatever industry you are in, you need to have your own style. Or else you'll never make it too the top. A wrestler can't afford to be stupid. Whether a business man or a gangster, an idiot will always be third rate.”

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“.....”

“At the end of the day, the world of pro wrestling runs on a system or seniority. There is a rigid system in place. The places are already decided. Junior wrestlers aren't allowed to beat senior wrestlers.”

“How do they decide the placing?”

“That's a tricky question to answer. It's decided in the persons career, how controversial they are and a bunch of other factors.”

“...”

“But that's not the only thing you have to worry about.”

“Really?”

“You are able to make it to the top. As soon as you reach that level. I said that junior wrestlers aren't allowed to beat senior wrestlers, but in special cases they can. If the junior wants to win. You can ignore the offense-defense of bouncing off the ropes. On cement.”

“...”

“But even so, it's really hard for a junior to beat a senior. Because there is a referee. A large part of how the match turns out depends in the referee. They're just salary men, really, even if they call themselves referees. The companies don't wrestle at a disadvantage. But even so, there are some wrestlers who win.”

“And what happens when they do?”

“Quite a bit, actually.”

“...”

“You'll have sanctions put against you if you ignore the theory behind wrestling.”

“What kind of sanctions?”

“There are some times when they will put you up against a much stronger opponent for a beating, and it also affects your salary. Sometimes the wrestling outfit will cut their contract with you. And maybe you might get attacked by a man with a knife as you walk home late at night...”

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“Scary.”

“But there are some people that make the big time by doing that. Just as long as they draw a crowd. Just as long as they are a wrestler that can generate some money. As long as you bring in the punters, and thus bring in the money, and the fans, the promoter will protect you.”

“...”
“There are a lot of wrestlers that break legs and arms. That's just lip service. If they really did break someone's leg or arm in the ring the mass media would be all over it in no time. That's for sure”

“...”
...

Date looked at Bunshichi but remained silent. There was a self-deprecating smile that shone through his eyes.

“We're getting off track. You were talking about Kajiwara.”

“Oh, yeah.”

“You were saying that you wanted to storm the ring and take on Kajiwara.”

“That I did.”

“That won't be easy...” said Date, glancing away from Bunshichi. The slim cherry blossom branches moved with the wind.

“You've really got to put on a show, and even if you do get out there you no one will know who you

are.” Bunshichi grinned as Date spoke.

“Something funny?” asked Date.

“I didn't pick you to be such a serious person,” said Bunshichi. Date grinned. The cloth around his head was stained red with blood. But his smile disappeared with the gentle breeze.

“The Hokushinkan, huh?” He said, spitting the word out into the wind.

“Do you have a history with them?” asked Bunshichi.

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“I've fought that Matsuo before, you know. In the ring.”

“Matsuo Shozan check name?”

“Yeah.”

“When?”

“A while ago. When we were in the central pro-wrestling circuit. I was a lot younger then. It was only my second year wrestling. I told you before that I was in it for the money, but that wasn't

entirely true. I really wanted to get stronger. I was confident, too. At the time I thought I was the best fighter in my circle.” Date wasn’t looking at Bunshichi anymore. His eyes were gazing out into the darkness and the wind. “And then Matsuo came. Just like you. He came to challenge the Dojo.

“Did he?”

“Yeah. I was his opponent. Just me. No one else wanted to fight him and I was the top fighter out who was left at the club.”

“Well?”

“I lost. Utter defeat.” Date drew back his lips to expose his teeth as he spoke. They were white and sturdy. “These aren’t my teeth. Matsuo knocked them all out,” said Date. A vision of Date with a bloody mouth appeared in the back of Bunshichi’s head. “He messed me up with his punches and his kicks, then got me at the end with a shoulder-hold.

There has only be one man who stepped out of the ring without a scratch – Kawabe’s words floated

through Bunshichi's mind. That might have been Matsuo Shozan.

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“...”

“He's not human. But he's not a beast either. That's the impression he gave me. He's huge. He felt like a ball of pure strength. If he takes anyone on, even the strongest of the strong, who had trained for years, he would still beat them. Pro wrestlers are nothing compared to him. You'll know that power when you see it. I couldn't see it when I took him on. I couldn't see how far apart we were in terms of power. That's when I gave up on trying to be strong, and became a wrestler for money.” Said Date. Something stirred inside of Bunshichi.

“Matsuo Shozan...” his voice grew a little horse as he mumbled the name.

CHAPTER VI

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The arena was engulfed in the excitement and energy coming from over three thousand people. The Korakuen Hall. It was packed with spectators, some of which had to stand. Date, who was using the name Raging Bull, along with the Crazy Dog, had just finished a tag team match against Kawafuta and Wakabayashi from the East-West Wrestling federation. There was a ten minute interval they called 'ring maintenance'.

Halfway through the fight, Date and Dog grabbed some weapons and drew blood from Kawafuta's face. It was an amazing fight. Kawafuta was smacked down in the middle of the ring, unable to move, and Date had slammed his body down on him countless times. Then Wakabayashi had come

flying in from the corner and landed a kick in Date's back.

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That's when the arena went wild. The amount of excitement and encouragement had crossed the line of what was normal for an event like this and had started to get out of hand. Regardless of the stops in place, it was starting to boil over. The crowd was going wild, and the wrestlers were following suit.

Dog was full of tension and had moved himself around well, but the biggest reason for the commotion was because Kajiwara's match was next. Date had finally found a weapon, and when he went to get it he had been distracted by the ref, and then had taken a fly-kick. That was when Date and Dog had lost due to a rule violation.

Futakawa, who had his head split open, and Wakabayashi had their hands raised by the ref and won, but on that day, there were no losers. They had managed to push the fight beyond that of a simple wrestling match. They had managed to get the crowd into the action without any of the wrestlers getting injured, and would now be on their way to the semi-finals. The fight still lingered in the air.

Bunshichi was standing at the foot of the catwalk. From there he was looking out over the ring, which was illuminated with bright light. It had a strange air to it. A ring with no one standing in it seemed to bright and a hollow. A vision of the man who should be standing in that ring floated in the back of Bunshichi's mind. A man whose skin sagged just a little bit. He wasn't the type with a muscle crammed body, and his skin gleamed like the scales of a snake. Kajiwara.

Bunshichi rolled the man's name around in his

mouth. It felt strange. The vision that floated in Bunshichi's head was of those big round eyes he saw six years ago.

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Those eyes that turned sharp and piercing as soon as he stepped into the ring. They were thin like a snake's eyes. The only things he could think about was his face and that he had a body like raw rubber. Bunshichi wondered how much he had changed.

Bunshichi stopped thinking about it. He only had five minutes. He felt strange when he thought about Kajiwara. He really asked himself if he really wanted to take him on again. There were times when that black flame that burned all through his body was finally starting to cool down. He thought that he was being petty, acting like a child.

It was just then that the searing pain shot through

Bunshichi's shoulder and was reborn in the same place. He thought about that pain, remembered Kajiwara as he would have looked down at him as he was panting. And of course the fire lit by the humiliation of defeat. No matter how you looked at it, right now Bunshichi could not think about anything without thinking about Kajiwara as well.

Bunshichi thought about the look Date had given him as he got down from the ring. "Here", that night Date pointed to his forehead with his finger.

It was in Date's room in the hotel. They were sitting there sharing a bottle of whiskey that came with the room. Ryoji was there too, drinking a whiskey mixed with water. Blood was no longer flowing from the wound in Date's head.

Raw red flesh hung from the spot where Date had used his finger on himself.

“Do it here,” said Date.

“Bleed a lot, even if you only have light wounds. There isn't as much damage for the amount of blood. If you're aiming at getting in the ring, do it here. You have to do it in the first hit. There won't be a next time. There will be a bunch of young guys all over you. But those young guys probably won't know what to do straight away. You need to take them out before they realize that you jumping in the ring isn't part of the show. They'll beat you half to death if they catch you. They'll really mess you up. No matter how strong you are.”

“I understand.”

“If your aim isn't to hurt Kajiwara, then get the hell out of there. Try to get him to bleed as quick as you can.”

“Uh-huh”

“A TV crew will be there on the day. They will be recording. There might even be some sports-mag reporters there as well. And the guy that Kajiwara is going to face. Whatever you do, don't jump in

there while the fight is on. It's too far to try and make it to the exit, and people always complain about coming in second. You need to be close to the exit when you get out of there.”

“...”

“If you're not too messed up, and even if you don't want it to happen, the east-west wrestling federation is going to look for you. When that happens, get in touch with the wrestling worlds mass media, and tell them that you were the one that jumped in the ring with Kajiwara and that you want to take him on again. If it all goes to plan, you might get a better result than you thought. But then you will have to get back into a east-west pro wrestling ring.”

“That doesn't sound easy.”

“If you don't want to do that, you could always challenge Kajiwara to a fight somewhere private. You might be surprised how willing he is. Don't know what Kawabe will have to say about it, though.”

“Heh.”

“Well whatever you do, there is no guarantee it will go as planned. There are a lot of ins-and-outs in this business. There isn't much more I can do for you now. I'll just get myself a good seat on the day. It doesn't have anything to do with me whatever happens between the you and Kajiwara. I'm only going there as a spectator.” Date's words lingered in Bunshichi's ears.

The lights of the arena finally dropped. The arena was draped in darkness. The only lights in the building shone onto the ring. A fast and intense rock beat sounded out from within the darkness. The arena exploded with energy. The sound of the crowd was unreal. A deep sound echoed in the pit Bunshichi's stomach.

“KA-JI-WA-RA”

“KA-JI-WA-RA” People were putting extra emphasis on the first part of the name and clapping.

The voices quickly filled up the arena. Kajiwara had lost the championship belt in a fight in America just before coming home to Japan. He had come home dethroned, but it seemed that the fans already knew.



Suddenly a bright spotlight fell just behind where Bunshichi was standing. The half naked body in the spotlight started moving in time with the rhythm. Kajiwara wasn't wearing a robe or a gown or anything like that. He looked just the same as he did when he was in the middle of a fight. He had on a pair of wrestling boots over a pair of wrestling pants.

He had his head facing downwards while he casually jogged towards the ring. From left and right, there were children and adults cheering him on.

The young men in front carved a line through the crowd. Kajiwara walked straight past the side of Bunshichi. Bunshichi could hear his labored breathing in the darkness. Bunshichi's heart suddenly started beating in time with Kajiwara's breathing. His muscles suddenly warmed up for some reason. The lower part of his thick back muscles began to shake.

Kajiwara stood silently in the corner of the ring as the announcer introduced the fighters. Bunshichi could only make out Kajiwara's back. Kajiwara was hanging his head in shame, you could tell that just from looking at him. But Bunshichi knew. He knew that those snake-like eyes were glaring up at his foreign opponent.

Bunshichi couldn't make out the name of the foreign opponent. Bunshichi had all his attention on Kajiwara's back. Kajiwara's body and his face were more or less the same as when Bunshichi first fought him. He saw that back, like raw rubber.

But there was a certain air that hung around Kajiwara. It was everything else around him that had changed. Just like Bunshichi, Kajiwara was no longer the man he once was. Bunshichi wondered if Kajiwara remembered him. I'm here. That's what he thought to Kajiwara. There was no mistaking that Kajiwara had no idea what Bunshichi was going to do once he had finished his match. Bunshichi clenched his teeth.

A thick, wild smile formed on his lips. The teeth that poked out his hanging lips made a grinding sound. It was a few seconds after the gong rang to indicate the start of the match. Kajiwara started kicking. His right leg flew up of the canvas. His sharp toes struck his opponent and then flew up even higher in the air. It was an impressive kick, even for a well trainer karate fighter. The crowd went wild “KAJIWARA!”

Bunshichi let out voice that was almost a scream.

Kajiwara had that snake-like like look in his eyes as he looked down on his opponent, who now lay crumpled on the mat.

***PART IV: INTRUSION
THE END.***

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***PART V: EVIL BEAST
CHAPTER I***

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The three men entered the Hokushinkan director

room. These were the main directors: Matsuo Shozan himself, followed by Himekawa Tsutomu and, surprisingly, by Kawabe from Toyoo Pro-Wrestling. The three of them sat down on the big sofa as all of their attention was on a large television screen bolted to the adjacent wall.

Switching on the television, they could view the broadcast directly from the pro-wrestling arena in Korakuen Hall. The match was just beginning, the first minute and fifteen seconds: Kajiwara submitted his opponent and made short work of him; in this moment he was exiting the ring. The announcer's voice could barely be heard among the screaming hordes of fans.

This pro-wrestling match was incredibly fast in reaching its conclusion, as expected, the triumphal return of one of the fiercest wrestlers, although it wasn't the norm for a main event to finish so quickly. Kajiwara didn't pull any punches on this fight; he got right down to business. The single arm

lock, a popular locking technique among Judokas, jujutsu practitioners and the mixed martial artist, was put upon the opponent with such ferocity that he had to give up the match or risk a miserable injury.

Led by a young man, Kajiwara was walking toward

Suddenly, he stopped.

There was a man that stood in front of Kajiwara, p
“Who is this idiot?” Kajiwara thought to himself.

The man held out his right hand and uttered someth

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The crowd was stirred into frenzy and rushed the
In a flash, the man struck Kajiwara's forehead, so

The dense humanity that blocked the exit had Kajiwara

Escalating to the border between passionate reporting and screeching, the announcer began repeating the same words from the crowd.

“Who was he!!?” “Why did he do it!!?” “Is Kajiwa...
Besides that, he couldn't say anything else...unable to say anything else.

Kawabe, who was supposed to be a guest commen-

The announcer, who was supposed to be informed of the intruder's name at the moment he was scripted to barge in, shouted in a different tone that gave away the fact that it was an unscripted assault by an unknown man. Eventually, the broadcast showed the list of matches and names of wrestlers that were going to be featured in next week's show.

“I guess you do it like this, correct?” Kawabe said.

Matsuo Shozan waited a few minutes for Kawabe to return to his seat, after a brief pause he said with a deep voice.

“So, that's Bunshichi Tanba.”

Kawabe and Himekawa nodded.

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“He's the intruder...”

Shozan was looking at Himekawa and Kawabe wit

“Looks interesting, to think that he would go as far
“He's pretty skilled, also very tough” Himekawa re

After a few minutes while Kawabe was silent,
Shozan asked.

“How's Kajiwara?”

“Nothin' serious...bleedin' a lot, but....” Kawabe

“What kind of weapon was used in the assault?”

“Several bundles of forks wrapped in wires. They

“Does Kajiwara know who the opponent was?”

“He does now.”

“Why now....?”

“On the day of the filming, everyone kept their mo-

“High-as-fuck-spirits, eh?”

“Yeah, that night, he yelled at me demanding why

“Hmmm...such a young guy” Shozan muttered with

“So, what's gonna happen now?”

“What Tanba Bunshichi did was brilliant, but luckily, his face wasn't exposed by the camera for too long, so talk-about relieving that nobody noticed a goddamned thing.” Kawabe said with a smile.

“What!!?”

“The one that assaulted Kajiwara wasn't Tanba, it was Hiroshi Nagata!?”

“A wrestler of the same class as Kajiwara, and he's ‘Hohohoho!!’” Matsuo answered with some laughs,

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“When he showed up about three years ago, he wa

“I see...”

“We picked up a guy, a guy that resembles Tanba t

“Hmm...”

“The person who assaulted Kajiwara was Nagata.

“I was wonderin' if, perhaps, some of the fans of t

“There's always that chance, but even if they were

“So, it was Nagata...yea?”

“Yeah”

“So it's safe to assume we're stickin' to it?”

“Yeah, we've been building the story line since ye

“What? What kind of story line's that?”

“Nagata is a wrestler from the same class as Kajiy

“That’s very good...”

“Yup.”

“"We've got it covered then, right?"”

“If that's true, then it'd be better if Tanba keeps it f

“What!?”

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“He wouldn't have a problem going to the media, I

“Yeah, we’re thinking the same thing.”

“Oh...”

“It would be beneficial if there were more guys c

“But then, Tanba would do something even more ex

“We'll cross that bridge when we get there.”

After hearing that, Kawabe stared silently at his right hand, which had the index finger wrapped in

a thick white bandage.

“I heard that Tanba was defeated once by a wrestl

“Yes...”

Kawabe made a tight fist with his right hand,
leaving the injured finger out.

“He did this....” Kawabe continued “But I'm not an

Kawabe's face became sour, looking as though it
was turning to stone.

“Regardless of his talent and brazenness, I have a

“Pffffttt...Hahahaha!...”

“But, do we know the right guy for the job?”

“The right guy for the job?”

“Crazy Dog, he's a foreigner that dreams to fight in

“I wonder if that would work, would it, do you thin

"It will, even if something crazy were to happen, I c

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"When I said "I wonder if that would work" I was

"What if the foreigner loses to Tanba? Have you c

"I don't really know, but even if he loses, it would

"Would it be?" Shozan stood up sluggishly and sta

"I was quite surprised when there was a call for n

"It was because Kajiwara showed up; some of my

"Just a few days ago in Shinjuku, some of my your

"That's understandable..." Himekawa answered w

"What about Shimura and Tsurumi?"

"They have totally lost their cool. It seems that the

"The three defeated guys were from Shimura's Do

“That's right. They're from the Nerima branch, to Himekawa's expression was somewhat indifferent. He didn't seem to be too concerned about the incident as it had nothing to do with him.

“Anyways if you excuse me, I'll be heading out no

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“I understand that if you're here today it must be

“Great Tatsumi is not the kind of person who would
“Only if he was the director of the organization.”

“I see, I don't think it'll be any good if they were to

“Yes, that's true” Kawabe replied.

“Pro-wrestling is the strongest martial art method

“.....” Kawabe looked at the ground for a second

“Tatsumi said so because he couldn't afford to keep

“Ain't that right, Himekawa? You know...” Shozan

Currently, The Hokushinkan Karate organization was engaged in a subtle rivalry with Toyoo pro-wrestling. When the Great Tatsumi claimed in a popular sports magazine that there was no

strongest martial art in the world than pro-wrestling, the fire started to spark among fighting groups of Japan. This was based on the fact that various MMA practitioners challenged Toyoo pro-wrestling and were soundly defeated on the mat. This statement was doubted by Hokushinkan as they had no proof of such matches and they were curious about their actual fighting ability.

To keep their reputation as the number one Karate organization in the world, The Hokushinkan could not accept Tatsumi's statement out of the blue. Therefore they demanded to that sport magazine to denounce and detract the comment made in the previous edition.

“That made an editor very heart-broken...” Shozan
“ But when it comes to the heart of the issue, it is 1

“ I understand, Mr. Matsuo, that you are speaking 1

In just seconds, Kawabe's eyes became hard like a rock and the menacing glance was directed straight at Matsuo. In return to that, Matsuo answered with a think gentle smile.

“Heh, well, I'll take that answer. For now...”

“I appreciate it.” Kawabe answered in a dry tone
A few moments after Kawabe left the place,
Shozan crossed his arms for a while and stared
into an empty space.

“Say, Himekawa” speaking with a deep voice.

“What is it?”

“The world of Karate in Japan might have just sta
Releasing his arms, he clenched his fists and starec

“ But to think he had the balls to invade the arena :

“So it seems....” Himekawa said, while Shozan w

“Damn, this never ends, how troublesome.”

“Troublesome? For you?”

“Yes, Himekawa, I'm troubled.”

“Hah!! why is that?”

“Cause this things make me excited.”

“Excited you say?”

“Well, what would happen if I were to make a con

Looking at Matsuo Shozan, Himekawa saw him as excited as a little kid that's about to receive an awesome Christmas present.

“It would be so much fun if I were to wear a mask

“Hey, don't get too many ideas about it, I still have Shozan relaxed his hands and once again placed it on the desk.

“By the way, I got a call from Izumi yesterday.”

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“Wait, you mean Izumi San, from Nara!!?” Himekaw

“Yes, it seems his daughter will arrive to Tokyo to

“You mean Saeko San?”

“Yes, Technically, she was supposed to come and

“But what?...”

“You know why is she coming here better than any

CHAPTER II

“What the hell's going on!!?” “Why do they say it w

Ryoji threw the sport newspaper across the room.

Behind that dirty glass you could see the soft orange tone of the town's sunset. Since they were located in the second floor of the Inn. A nearby alley was so narrow, it seemed that the window was directly facing the wooden apartment building on the other side. The cheap cream colored painting was chipping off, giving the apartment a marginal look and sloppy appearance. It was most likely that the roof was going to leak if it rain, but they weren't concerned about it.

But the room that Bunshichi stayed in was not much different either. Originally, the front wall was

white, but now, it turned somewhat brownish or even yellowish. A dark stain that looked like the pattern of a map was increasing in size too. Most likely it was caused by the rain that leaked through the ceiling. The pain was also peeling here and there, including a few prank doodles from some street kids. You could say you were looking at a surrealist piece of art.

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“It doesn't seem you are the least concerned. Aren't

Trying to sound arrogant, Ryoji stood up from the other side of the table staring at Tanba. His lips sharpened and his face frowned. His teenager angst was appropriate of a young guy of his age.

But Bunshichi had a calm demeanor and his eyes were quietly lost somewhere in the light outside.

Since Ryoji didn't get the reaction that he wanted from Tanba, He sulked and sat cross-legged.

“Damn it!!” he muttered to himself.

At his feet was that popular sports newspaper with a headline written in big red letters.

“*NAGATA CHALLENGES KAJIWARA*” While a line

There was an image of Hiroshi Nagata's full body, whose posture was almost copied from the posture that Bunshichi had. There was a close-up picture of him too, A face that also resembled much of Bunshichi.

If we were to compare Bunshichi and Nagata, Nagata would be somewhat younger but no more than three years or so.

“I don't see what part of him resembles you, this is

“Tell me the truth, He's more handsome than me, h

“Tsk!! I don't know.” Ryoji placed his elbows on t

“What a pity...” Bunshichi replied and looked onc

“What...?”

“The fact that I like to mess around and cause trou

“.....”

“I went as far as crashing the show, standing face 1

“Well, it's not going to be that easy this time aroun

“I don't care about them.”

“So, what are you gonna do now, Old man?”

“ I'll be happy as long as I get to fight Kajiwara. It

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“.....”

“ Should I go and see him directly?” Murmured Bi

“Who?”

“ Kajiwara, of course. In fact, that's what I should’

“ So you're going to show up in front of him now, (

Bunshichi stood up sluggishly. He didn't look the sa
His bare muscular upper body was shown and the
width of his neck stood out on his thick rock solid
chest.

“I'm going to Yokohama.” Bunshichi said while ta
“He'll be in Yokohama...”

“That's the place where Toyoo pro-wrestling will

On Bunshichi's back and belly, there was a big knife wound. The wound on his belly seemed to come from a knife that had been stabbed in deeply, Leaving a deep scar. There were also countless small injuries .

The wound on his back started from his right shoulder and ran all the way to his left side, much like a diagonal line.

By looking at it, you'd think that someone slashed h
Reaching with his hand, he grabbed a bag in the corner of the room and opened the zipper. Taking the black trainer pants from inside, there were a few extra clothes. Depending on the angle that you'd look, the back of the clothes looked somewhat gray instead of its natural shiny black. This was because they were stained in different colors. Something like blood. Bunshichi started to

put his trainers and his tank top shirt, these were the same clothes he used in the fight against Souichiro Izumi.

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“Are you really gonna fight him tonight?” murmur€

“Tonight is a big event, the guy might not even be i

Taking out the sneakers from the bag, he put them on the tatami. The collar of the trainers that was recently washed was now tightened against his neck. Originally the collar was wide enough for people to wear it on, but Bunshichi's neck was too wide. He put both of his thick index fingers on the collar to spread it out. He was able to make it wide enough.

“I'm going for a quick jog, I'll be back in about thi

“You too, get ready to leave after I come back. We

He didn't close the sliding door. He just walked out to the corridor. In the way he smelled something from the toilet. A strong smell of disinfectant invaded his nose. A few steps more and he found the staircase. Because of his huge body, he made a creaking sound on the stairs while he was walking down.

Hearing the sound from a distance, Ryoji suddenly got a weird gut feeling and ran outside unexpectedly.

“Hey, old man!!”

But the only sound he got in response was the glass door entrance being closed.

Thirty minutes passed, but Tanba did not come back. Forty five minutes passed, fifty minutes passed but Bunshichi still had not come back. The

room was now in complete darkness, because the darkness of the night took place as a silent guest.

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“That damn idiot!!” Ryoji stood up in the darkness
“That guy, he left by himself!!”

CHAPTER III

“Wow, what a gorgeous room you have, you must love living here...”

Said the gorgeous woman who was sitting down on

a leather sofa. She had black straight hair that ran down to her shoulder. Her thick lips were covered in red lipstick and remained half opened after the last sentence she just said. After checking her surroundings, she sealed her lips again. After she sealed them, she was facing her front. At her sight was Himekawa Tsutomu, sitting in front of her with a sweet smile on his lips.

His skin was soft and white and he also had red lips. His features were so delicate that in a quick glance you might have mistaken him for a woman. His hair also was as long and shiny as the woman in front of him. Giving him a close look, you might say he was pretty thin, but this was because he was tall. His arms were bigger than ordinary men and his chest was pretty thick. However, his body was usually covered tightly with black suits, so it was unnoticeable.

His toughness was chained under his elegant

clothes but with his posture, it looked like he could suddenly jump and easily reach the ceiling. Nobody knew this, but inside his body there is an unusual spring power that was sleeping and he was waiting for the worthy day to wake it and make it explode. But in the meantime, keeping a calm demeanor and smiling all the time, he looked like a beautiful man.

Saeko Izumi was the name of this beautiful Japanese woman that you could fall in love at first glance. The daughter of Izumi Souichiro. A fine lady with exquisite mannerisms. However, Himekawa knew that in bed, Saeko could quickly transform into a beast. She was a woman that was well versed in all kinds of sexual positions that could make you lose your mind.

That fact had been confirmed a million times by Himekawa's own body. She was the type that Himekawa liked the most.

“Well, I can't agree with you saying this is a “*gorgeous room*”. If you said it was an expensive room, I'd be a different story. But I picked just a few items that strike my fancy and decorated it with them.”

“Even so, it's still quite beautiful.”

She noticed that the carpet was imported but she didn't know what country it has been made but, judging from the furniture in the room, she knew this room was not the kind of place that a mere martial arts student, who lived by himself, would be able to afford. She moved her eyes up to the

corner of the room first, then, her eyes returned to Himekawa's view.

The smell of the room wasn't the one that you get when someone lives there. It was not dirty, and it looked like there had never been someone staining, cooking or making love there. So clean that you could almost lick the marble table.

But Saeko wasn't in the mood to discuss the apartment's design for much longer.

"That was the first time I heard that Izumi Sensei had encountered Tanba." Himekawa said.

"Yeah, dad looks old all of a sudden, just because he lost that fight."

"But Izumi Sensei is not the only person that wanted to fight Tanba, the director too."

"Really? He must be a very skilled man, then."

"I know him, I saw his face and the way he fights."

“You do, Himekawa? I'm also tempted to meet him, the man called Bunshichi Tanba.”

“Strangely, there are people capable to charm others in seconds, even the director was excited as a little kid, he has never met Tanba, yet, he has been in high spirits lately .

“In high spirits you say?”

“Like I say, he's like this big kid waiting for an exciting gift, he even started a secret training program for the actual fight.”

“Really? He's going to challenge him?”

“I can't tell you exactly about the director's true feelings. But rather than Tanba himself, I think he is seeing something larger than life in front of him.”

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Himekawa said these words without a hint of emotion or expression.

“Larger than life?” Saeko asked.

“Well...”

Himekawa made a big smile that show all his teeth. “That can be just a lucky guess of mine.”

“I just wonder about that really, I haven't been able to comprehend that man fully.”

“What about my father?”

“I know Izumi San, he *was* a great martial artist.”

“*was*...?”

“Until he was defeated by Bunshichi Tanba.”

“Quite ruthless, aren't you?”

“I mean no disrespect but that's the truth. I didn't mean to look down on Izumi San or anything. But a martial artist that calls himself “*a master*” should not lose, ever.”

“What about the director, Matsuo Shozan.”

“The director is a great man, because he has never been defeated.”

“Not even once?”

“Not even once.” Himekawa said this clearly.

“Izumi Sensei shouldn't have fought Tanba, because he didn't know anything about politics.”

“Politics?”

“It's just an example. Meanwhile, Matsuo Shozan got what it takes to win the challenge.”

“What do you mean?”

“Even though Izumi Sensei had the desire to fight a strong man, he did not embrace that desire to the point of wanting to unify the martial arts world.”

Saeko was staring at Himekawa, who smiled slightly.

“Have you lost?”

“No.”

“Really...?”

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“Really...”

“Ever since you were little?”

“That's right.” Said Himekawa while smiling.

“Although, there were times when I didn't enjoy fighting because my arm was broken off...”

“Your arm..broke off...?”

“Even so, I did not lose.”

“How so?”

“I'm not as stupid as to fight stronger or better opponents than me, I rather walk away from that. I only fight the ones that I'm certain I can win against.”

“But there must be times when you didn't have the option of running away from the fight, what would

you do then?"

"In that case, I wouldn't resist. If I didn't fight, I wouldn't lose anyway. Even if they broke my arm in the process."

Himekawa said this with an air of coolness while Saeko's big eyes gave him a slight surprised expression.

"Let me get this straight, You didn't do anything and just endured while your arm was broken?"

"That's right."

"....."

"When I become stronger than the opponent who broke my arm, then I'll avenge the injury that I sustained because of him by winning the fight. If you train with that goal in mind, not only you'll be able to train with all your passion and might, but also look for the next stronger opponent that you can stand a chance in the new level."

Saeko didn't say anything. All of a sudden she thought she saw a demon inside the smiles of Himekawa.

"Who do you think broke my arm?" Himekawa asked. Saeko shook her head with a puzzled face. Himekawa embraced her, got his mouth closer to her ear and whispered softly....

"It was Matsuo Shozan..."

After that, he let her go and took a step back while smiling, Himekawa's smiles were giving Saeko goosebumps.

She saw that demon, it's power and destruction. Looking at his eyes, There was a world without Imagination.

“It seems that Shimura San and Tsurumi San are targeting you too, right?”

“Those two? Pfft...Hahaha, They're useless.”

“They said they wanted to fight Bunshichi Tanba no matter what.”

“Is that because three of Shimura's disciples got beaten up, right? You probably heard about that.”

“I'm just here to tell you about my father's state and will, whatever they do is up to them.”

“Aren't you a little bit insensitive about your father's condition?”

“My Father and I are way different. He sacrificed all his time and effort to martial arts without regard for his family.

It seems that my mother died because of that. But that doesn't mean I hold a grudge or hate my father, after all, he's the one that taught me to live the way I enjoy to live.

“Is that so?”

"For that very reason too, I don't think my father would ask me to return to live with him if I decided to remain in Tokyo."

For all the moment they were talking, Saeko finally faced Himekawa and smiled to him for the first time.

CHAPTER IV

Himekawa stood up completely naked, in front of him was Saeko, kneeling down naked, as expected. With the soft lights turned on, one could see two beautiful naked bodies throwing themselves into passion.

His body was hard and tough. He didn't have too many big muscles but they were lean and tight. If you were to touch his body, under that smooth skin you'd verify that his muscles were very flexible.

Saeko was charmed by this and closed her eyes, then, slowly she started to kiss the many parts of his groin area. Both her hands were approaching towards the hard area by exploring the sides. While her lips were clinging on his manhood, she put down her fingers and tried to swallow him more. His tip was supposed to thrust all the way to her throat.

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She slowly pulled back her lips, making that wet shaft come into sight. She started kissing his member from his sensitive part up to the edge, she even bit it softly. Pursing it into her cheek and

twisting her face. Her tongue moved from the bottom up to the top without leaving a single area untouched. Himekawa's hands were buried deep into Saeko's hair.

He started moving her head back and forth into his groin. It was unclear if Himekawa was keeping the rhythm or if she was moving her body on her own.

Saeko's buttocks could be seen shaking a little as she was moving her head. Removing her mouth, she opened her eyes and look up to Himekawa.

“Do it.” Saeko said with a sensual voice.

She pressed the floor with her two hands and lifted her butt. Himekawa turned to her back and started caressing her chest from behind. There was a dirty scene for a moment and something seem to burst from inside her flower. She was finally wet enough for him to enter inside of her.

“Do it...” she started sounding more desperate than

“Do it....” she said it again.

“Do it to me, here” her fingers opened her flower
“Come inside of me...”

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Himekawa finally gave in and started kneeling. Ju Saeko grabbed Himekawa's hard manhood with her hand that was so wet from being inside of her and pressed it to her own.

“Do it to me....as hard as you can!!”

At the moment that Himekawa started thrusting, Saeko finally turned into a white roaring beast. Crawling hungry on top of the carpet. Her breasts were held by Himekawa's hands. Saeko Crawled herself from the carpet to the sofa and lifted up her

upper body. Moving her arms, twisting her body and exposing her breasts. Her moans of pleasure were louder and louder.

Shortly after, she surrounded her arms into Himekawa's collar. She twisted her head, stucked out her tongue and joined her lips together. Her long, red tongue seemed to dance around, trying to lick something in the air.

Thirty minutes had passed since they got naked when a phone call interrupted the passionate scene. Himekawa slowly disentangled himself from Saeko who circled her arms on him underneath.

“No...”

Saeko let a tiny moan of disappointment go and lifted her upper body. But then she started crawling trying to chase Himekawa's shaft into her mouth. She was able to capture it just before he lifted the phone and answered the call.

“Hi, sir...We found Bunshichi Tanba!!” said the man

“What!? Where is he!!? is he in Yokohama!!?”

“That's right, sir...”

“I knew it....As long as Kajiwara is participating

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“Tell me his location.”

“He's in front of the Toukai Kankou hotel. Tanba is

“He's wearing black trainers, you say?”

Himekawa had the image of the day when
Bunshichi met Izumi Souichiro in Nara fresh and
burned into his memory.

He was also wearing black trainers in that day too

“Is he planning to fight Kajiwara seriously!!?

Himekawa's lips, that were inundated with the pleasant feeling of Saeko's lips, got tense immediately.

“What does he have against Kajiwara!!?”

“His TV match is over , so he's staying at the hotel

“Understood”

“After that Shimura San and Tsurumi San went to t

“I'll be there soon.” Himekawa said with a hasty v

Both of his hands hugged Saeko who was still chewing. He secured Saeko's head and she moved it wildly.

During their intimate moment, the only person who appeared in Himekawa's mind was Bunshichi Tanba.

CHAPTER V

Wearing some comfortable trainers that had the “To-

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He left the hotel around 10:30. A normal athlete would take the night off and rest all day the next day. It was not recommendable for them to train right after the match was over, let alone going out at night for some jogging like Kajiwara. But it was a habit for him. Kajiwara was always training even in his spare time. Even after or before matches, that issue didn't concern him much and never had an effect on him.

Kajiwara never suffered from over exerting himself. He was tough enough to bear the soft pain of an injury every now and then, he forgot about his resistance and he just continued his routine as one would watch TV or sit in the sofa to read a book. Before jogging, he did some bending and stretching in front of the hotel and took off.

His pace was fast and constant. To avoid running into pedestrians, he was alternating between the street and the sidewalk.

A little after running beyond the downtown lights, he passed a big shadow of a man that started following his pace of running, lining up next to him. Yes, it was that man, Bunshichi Tanba.

He was silent and both men ran side by side. A passerby that came in front of them moved out of the way. The city lights were even more distant, lighting their backs as they ran. Although Kajiwara

was a tall man, with a simple look, their body weight was about the same.

“So, you finally came, huh?”

“That's correct” Bunshichi answered.

They were silent for a while, while still running side by side at the same pace. When they suddenly arrived to a busy street with a red light, both of them stopped there. The light turned to green and both men crossed.

After crossing the signal, they stood up in the sidewalk. Beyond the light, there was an asphalt road that both of them followed. Gradually the scene got darker and darker until, eventually, the whole street was just illuminated by the moon.

They did not run anymore.

Shoulder to shoulder, they started walking calmly and silently.

“How's your wound?” Bunshichi asked suddenly.

“It healed alright, it wasn't a big deal at all.”

“I see...” Bunshichi answered, then kept his silence for a little while.

There was an air of opportunity that was blending with the wind. “a sudden attack? Is he waiting for it?”

“Damn, it was close...” Bunshichi answered with a smile.

“Close? What are you talking about?”

“The belt. The champion belt you got in America. That return match was for the purpose of going

back and taking it once again, isn't it?"

"That's not true, actually I just gave it away."

"What!? You...?"

"If you get a national champion title over there, you cannot afford to come back to Japan, unless you pay a high price for a few months off, otherwise, they will keep booking you for title defenses over and over, there's great demand for rematches there."

"Man, it is so confusing, the business deal of fighting."

"That is true...unlike us...."

Kajiwara suddenly appeared as the one that seized that chance, when his words were stolen by the wind.

Everything got quiet....

"You surprised me over there." This time, it was Kajiwara the one that started the conversation.

"What!!?"

“Right at the moment when you appeared in front of me in the Korakuen hall.”

“Because it was so sudden and unexpected, was it?”

“At first, I didn't notice it was you, but then, you raised your hand and everything came back to me.”

“Yeah, that's when I tried to...”

“Nobody told me you went to the old Kawabe's gym.”

“What if you knew?”

“Then I would have been waiting for you, ready to fight you once again, in your favorite place.”

“That means, you're pissed off about it, eh?”

“You're correct.” Kajiwara answered, somewhat bored and absentminded.

“Why is that?”

“I don't understand, why didn't you come to me first!? Why did you have to take a detour and make things more complicated? It'd have been better for me if you have come and ambushed me here in the middle of the night, without the drama that has ensued.”

“I should have done that...uh?”

“Man, do you like the drama and the crowds screaming that much?”

“Hahahah...Maybe...” Bunshichi laughed a little.

“To be honest, I was a little freaked out by you, scared even...”

“Scared of me? Really?”

“Yes...”

“.....”

“That evening, when we met at the Korakuen

hall, all I could think was what would I have done if I were to attack you, I kept wondering about...”

“About what?”

“Dunno, about what kind of fight were you offering, would you counter attack if I attacked you? If I took advantage before you could recover? If to accept your challenge and listen to your conditions? Do we fight with rules or with all our might and tricks? In the ring or out of it? Those kind of things...”

“Ah, I see...”

“One can never be too sure about you, you might have pricked my eyes all of a sudden. Or kicking me in the balls. If you were to fight down and dirty, I would have done the same too, screw rules.”

“I’m very relieved.” Bunshichi answered calmly.

“Relieved?....”

“To hear that you were scared of me.”

“Hahah, ain't that funny?”

“I was scared of you too. Even now.”

“Hahah, hm... Sure...” Kajiwara relaxed a little and let a smile sneak through his lips.

The smell of opportunity has gotten stronger and more intense.

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“You'd be surprised, there are a lot of killer tricks in pro-wrestling, as in everything. But they're deemed too dangerous and it is discouraged to use them on the ring.”

“Like what?”

“Don't ask that, you know they're secret.”

“Ohh, I see where this is going.”

“The moment you discover them, it will be when we have an all-out fight.”

“All-out? You want a fight like that? Or maybe...”

Bunshichi asked with a suspicious tone.

This tone was to sense at what level Kajiwara wanted to take the fight. Kajiwara understood what Tanba was implying and tried to make sure about his real intentions.

“We can make it exciting but I don't want us necessarily to kill each other.” Said Kajiwara.

“Same here...” answered Bunshichi, then quietly added “Even though, the result will be that one of us will end up dead.” Kajiwara nodded in silence while they were quietly walking away.

This stroll continued in silence for a long time. The darkness directed Kajiwara's body heat to Bunshichi, who was walking next to him. He even could hear the sound of Kajiwara's breathing

clearly.

The feeling wasn't there, the one when you tell yourself "I'll kick this guy's ass now!!" They enjoyed the conversation along the way, and it seemed that they were walking and looking for an affordable bar to continue the chat.

He could hear his sound in the dark, while looking at the bright ocean that was illuminated by the moon and stars above. Walking forward a little, Tanba distinguished dots of lights. It was Yamashita park, since both of them entered it, Tanba decided to ask something.

"Could you tell me one thing?"

"What is it?

"When we fought last time, why didn't you break it?"

"That time?"

“When we fought for the first time, you had more than enough chances to break my arm.”

“That time, eh?”

“Yes...” Bunshichi said with determination in his eyes, Kajiwara didn't say anything. He seemed to be trying to remember something then he sighed and said.

“A little while ago, I did it...”

“You did it?”

“Yeah, in the opening performance show, Probably you've hear the name of the guy. Hiroshi Nagata.

“You broke Nagata's arm?.....”

“The guy didn't give up. He'd lost his cool. I just pulled a little more and it was broken.”

“.....”

“ It was a disgusting sound, I could hear it all

from my hand to my guts.”

“Hah, Hah...” Bunshichi smiled a little. Kajiwara turned to Bunshichi, then He moved back to face the darkness ahead of him.

“I will shatter it now.” Kajiwara stopped for the first time since they started walking.

Bunshichi, who was walking a little ahead of him, stopped and turned around looking at his face. Now they were finally facing each other.

“Do you want to fight here?” Bunshichi asked bluntly. But Kajiwara shook his head.

“ Didn't you hear what I said? I told you it was complicated. This is not just my problem anymore. More people got involved now and Toyoo pro-wrestling lied to the press and the media. The number of people involved with this issue has increased.”

“I see, so the big guy that has been following us for a while, he's also...?”

“Yes...”

“Hah, hah, This is so predictable, the dude is so huge, he's unsuitable to tail anyone without being spotted.”

“Kawabe said that if you beat him without being broken in the end, then we can fight.”

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“Hahahah... One detail that escaped Kawabe's mind, though. What if I decided to kick you ass right now? What would you do, then?”

“I don't care either way, but I'm not the one that will attack you first, he is. You attack me and you'll have to fight both of us at the same time. A poor idea considering the fact that he has fought in New York and honed his skills there for some time. If

you decide to go ahead, then, this will hardly be a match of skills.”

“Damn that Kawabe, I guess I owe him this match for bending his finger.”

“I'm going to train a little and I'll be back in about an hour or so. If you're still in the mood for fighting me, then just come. But you still need to defeat that guy first.”

“You have plenty of energy left for what I can see.”

“If I don't exhaust myself at the end of the day, then I can't sleep well. That's how I do it.”

Kajiwara said this while giving a deep look at Bunshichi. Once he said this, he turned around slowly and walked a few steps before starting jogging again. It would seem that his figure was swallowed by the darkness and disappeared soon enough.

Bunshichi turned slowly and there it was, a giant

shadow waiting for him.

It was a tall, blond man with long hair, he must have been about 6.5" Ft. tall. A giant with blue eyes that stared silently at Bunshichi while getting closer to him, you could only heard his steps and the wind around the trees. He was like a mad dog when he fought, that earned him the nickname of "Crazy Dog" in the fighting circles. His shiny eyes were glowing in the darkness while staring at Bunshichi, when he got close enough. He stopped, smiled a little and then laughed loudly.

He reeked of alcohol and cheap cigarettes, that smell reached Bunshichi quick enough. With a quick glance, Bunshichi assessed the man that he was about to fight. By his looks, he was 6'5" Ft. and about 240 lbs estimated on his build.

Compared to Bunshichi, he had an advantage of 66 lbs. of pure muscle for what it looked like. The man was wearing a comfy business suit and his chest was wide open. You could see a bush of golden hair over the hard muscles.

Bunshichi got ready for the fight, bending his knee slowly and lowering his stance, he already decided his moves for the opening and counter-attacks. But the scene got interrupted by a loud scream in the darkness.

“WAIT!!” A deep and solid voice was heard.

Two men appeared behind Crazy Dog. These guys were a tad shorter than Bunshichi but their height was still close to the 6’0. Ft. It was obvious that, in regard to fighting, these weren’t ordinary men.

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When they advanced, their steps didn’t make sounds. Being men with excellent footwork, probably martial artists with thirst for blood at whatever price it might come. Both of them moved slowly and stood right in the middle. Back-to-back, One faced Crazy Dog, the other glared at

Bunshichi. Both of them had exceptionally sharp eyes.

“I’m Shimura, from Hokushinkan.” Said the man that stood in front of Bunshichi.

“I want to have a fight with you, Tanba Bunshichi!!”

“What!? With me?”

“The man behind me is Tsurumi, we both have been informed that you were the guy that took down our students in Shinjuku. Izumi-sensei was the one that told us. That’s reason enough to challenge you without delay!!”

“Well, I’m in the middle of something right now. If you don’t mind, I’ll fight you another day. Gotta finish this first.”

“ I won’t accept that!!”

“Come on!! I’m not gonna run away.”

“We’re gonna fight, right here, right now!!” The man was determined in his answer.

Crazy Dog was confused and had a perplexed look that quickly turned into anger.

“Get the fuck outta my way!!” he roared.

The guy fought so many hard battles in the past. And, by his own might and talent, he had gotten himself a main event at the Madison Square Garden arena in New York. His pride never let anyone get in his way and this wasn't going to be the exception either. The giant walked around Tsurumi without touching him. Being so close to a taller man, Tsurumi wasn't scared and he figured that, if the giant tried something funny, he would deliver a solid kick in the groin area and the giant would be done for.

All of a sudden, Crazy Dog held Tsurumi's shoulders with pressing power. That's when it happened....

Tsurumi kicked his right leg to the ground to launch his attack. The force and speed of his attack was amazing, His kick was directed at Crazy Dog's groin area. The contact made a cracking sound. The movement of Tsurumi's leg stopped midway because Crazy Dog checked the kick with his giant knees that were surprisingly fast. Crazy Dog laughed out loud before delivering a devastating head-but to Tsurumi that was barely blocked and answered with a solid punch.

That was the start of the fight.

CHAPTER VI

The wind that came from the ocean was so cold

that it created a chilling atmosphere. A taxi stopped right at Yamashita park and a man walked out from it. It was Himekawa Tsutomu. As soon as he walked and entered the park, he sat down on the bench close to a big tree's shadow. Looking around, he only noticed a couple walking away. Those were the only human figures he could distinguish. Moving further, he kept walking and started looking at the ocean that was at his right side.

He could sense that someone was there, even though the hunch wasn't strong enough. Instead of a person, he was sensing something more alike to a sharp object and someone's unusual breath. It was tearing up the atmosphere. It was not the wind, it was something else.

His eyes were moving into that direction until he noticed a human shadow moving, doing familiar Karate moves with hands and feet that he recognized doing with his own body hundreds of times.

“Is he practicing Hokushinkan style Karate!?”

Himekawa approached this figure and the movement stopped at once.

“Oh!!, Mr. Kajiwara, It's you!!” Himekawa said.

As the shadowy figure stopped moving, He turned to face Himekawa.

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“Wow, you surprised me...” Making a strange expression, Kajiwara did not look or sound surprised even though that is what he said so.

“You sure don't sound like a cat or another animal that might be wandering at this hour.”

“ You're Mr. Kajiwara, am I right?” Himekawa said by getting close to him.

“That's correct.”

“I'm Himekawa Tsutomu from Hokushinkan's main branch.”

“Himekawa...?”

“I'm a person that has worked very closely with Matsuo Shozan Sensei. He has taken good care for me.”

“Oh, I see. So, what are you doing here?”

“I was waiting for someone, an old friend of mine.”

“A friend of yours?”

“Yeah, sort of...”

“Might this person be Tanba Bunshichi?”

Himekawa asked while Kajiwara made a strange look.

“How do you know him?”

“I've been looking for him, do you know where he is?”

“He's supposed to come here soon, I guess.” The

moment Kajiwara answered, they heard a thin scream within the darkness.

“Gwaaaargh!!”

“Over there!!” Himekawa said, moving his head towards the place where the scream came. Both men ran towards it.

CHAPTER VII

All of a sudden, Bunshichi's head had been hit by Shimura's kick with the right leg. A kick launched at flash speed that Bunshichi had to bent his elbow on the side of his head to block it.

While the kick landed, He stepped into his opponent's area with his right foot and kicked Shimura's leg with his left foot. That was the moment when Shimura launched a left fist that came flying at Bunshichi's face.

This was not an usual Karate blow, It was a weird attack. Bunshichi waited for contact and twisted his head to cross it. He was aiming for the leg but Bunshichi's kick was quite shallow. If he seriously wanted to cause more damage and having enough space, instead of launching a kick, Bunshichi would have punched him in the face.

Usually, if the opponent was at his same level of fighting skills, he would have not resort to launch a high kick all of a sudden. For that Bunshichi would have used his other foot and launched a few solid punches at the low and mid sections before launching a solid high kick that would not miss its target.

Suddenly, everything fell into place for Bunshichi.

“He’s a guy that likes to brawl creatively.”
Bunshichi thought while using some light
footwork.

In simple terms, his opponent mastered Karate just to use it as the base while mixing it with a few tricks here and there that will give him the advantage in a fight. A person just like himself used to deal with street combat often.
If that was the case, Bunshichi had the perfect answer for it.

“Hah, so you and me are the same, then?” he muttered quietly.

Then, he stopped all of a sudden, and he lowered down his arms in a relaxed stance. He just stood there in an upright position without an expression. His opponent closed the distance but he was using

a defenseless posture, in a fight, this was almost unthinkable. For a moment, he doubted if Shimura had an attack planned for that. He started doubting what was coming up next.

“Will he use a kick? A punch maybe?” Bunshichi started getting distracted.

It only took him 0.1 seconds to find out the answer as a right fist flew over towards Bunshichi's face. Even if it was only a second, hesitation can decide the outcome between victory and defeat. In this case, Bunshichi improvised a left fist but before he could launch it, it was caught with a right knee and pulled his left arm back.

While retreating, he saw that giant fist covering all his field of vision coming at him. Too late to do anything, his reflexes moved his right hand and caught that punch between his face and his open hand.

Absorbing the strong impact like a cushion, Tanba felt the power of that attack but his right hand was

holding Shimura's fist and he tried to sneak behind Shimura's back when he realized something.

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“Gwaaaargh!!” He screamed while his fist was inside Bunshichi's right arm. Shimura's wrist had been broken.

At the same time, Shimura's right knee had been sunk into Bunshichi's butt. A powerful attack that was way too close and it would have given Shimura more openings while Bunshichi was recovering from the pain of the impact, he felt it deep.

But this was not to be, as Shimura reached his limit of pain tolerance and collapsed in the floor screaming loudly like a flute. This was the scream that Himekawa heard.

CHAPTER VIII

Crazy dog's face was bleeding profusely, it was noticeable that blood were pouring from his mouth and nose. Even though, initially he was reeking of alcohol and tobacco, now his mouth was filled with blood and he was reeking of iron. Even half of his shirt changed color to a more darker stain.

In contrast, Tsurumi's face had become pale. His countless punches and kicks failed to reach the desired effect. He was sweating buckets but all that effort amount to little compared with the final result.

That's because the weight difference was simply too big. Almost 90 lbs of difference between him and the giant man.

Even though the giant wasn't a Karateka, he was still a pro-wrestler, used to take kicks and punches

to the face while minimizing the damage for long periods of time. But the body weight wasn't the only reason of his failure.

There's also the reach difference. Once you're grabbed, You'd be scared that your enemy will step into your balance area. If you could avoid it, You'd be able to reduce the damage that the opponent would inflict to you.

The mad dog was grinning and laughing loudly every time he will take a punch or a kick, even now with his bloody face, it was amusing to him. There was no mistake that he was thinking in that pleasant moment when he would have caught Tsurumi and finish him with whatever he pleased.

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In the other hand, Tsurumi, who was battered, injured and had ran out of options, was paralyzed by fear. But that didn't diminished his courage one

bit. He still had the guts to not run away.

“Hey, brother. I get that you're tough but he's still coming for me, wanna switch?” Bunshichi said in a relaxed and friendly tone to Tsurumi, that didn't answer and kept a determined look. But in reality, he did not have the composure to answer.

You just have to see that poor guy Shimura rolling in pain on the ground, his screams were loud enough to Tsurumi to hear, but he dared not look his way.

Bunshichi thought to himself that this was the very fear he experienced from Kajiwara in that fight six years ago, Tsurumi was in the same position and must be feeling the same.

“Doryyaaahhhh!!!” Tsurumi screamed before he jumped into Crazy Dog's chest.

Charging back his arm, he made a fist but then, he

left the index and middle fingers out and positioned them in form of a V, with those, he was aiming to stab Crazy Dog's nostrils, but as soon as they got closer. He decided to aim higher than that.

He was going to attack him right in his eyes.

Crazy Dog shook his head with a bloody smile. He stood in the same place and, even knowing that his opponent was aiming to take his eyes out, he didn't panic at all. It only took a small sway back with his head and the attack was useless.

While in mid air, Crazy Dog seized Tsurumi's shoulders and his fingers stopped right in front of Crazy Dog's face, showing the vast difference in reach of both men. Crazy Dog let a maniacal laugh while Tsurumi was paralyzed by fear.

“Aiehhh!!!” screamed Tsurumi.

Not only he failed to land that attack, it was the only attack that he could launch on him. For a

desperate man without options, this was the best he could hope for. Without making a mistake, Tsurumi thought that he would be able to pull it off if he was desperate enough.

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Tsurumi tried to pry himself open but Crazy Dog had him well secured with his arms like a bear hug. Tsurumi tried to scream loudly but his scream stopped midway.

“AieeeGUHHHHHHH!!!” Crazy Dog pressed him until all his oxygen escaped from his lungs.

“Baaaaahhhh” Tsurumi grasped for air, but when he tried to scream again, Crazy Dog pressed him once again.

This time, the mad dog kept pressing him without letting him breathe. His shoulders bulged like a bump while Tsurumi's ribs were making cracking sounds as his mouth was while open and he was convulsing shaking his head back and forth. His face started to turn blue while he flapped his mouth, desperately trying to grasp some air from his surroundings but it seems he wasn't able to. Crazy Dog unfastened his right arm and Tsurumi desperately let his lungs have some air but he was still seized by the giant's left arm, gasping violently. This time It was Crazy Dog the one that charged back his arm and made a fist, but it was different from Tsurumi. He only let one finger out, the index finger, that considering the thickness of his hand, it seemed that it was a giant pole.

“....What is he planning to do with that?”

Bunshichi was a little puzzled.

But when he saw how much he charged back that spooky finger, he felt his spine as cold as ice. In Bunshichi's mind, there was conflicting feelings.

For one, he wanted to see what would be the result of that attack, but in the other hand, He wanted to stop him from executing a man that was already defeated.

“Stop!!” Bunshichi Yelled a few moments later, but it was already too late.

Tsurumi let out a big scream...no, It was more like a howl that would pierce the ears of anyone that would listen to it.

A noise so hideous that it seems it was done by a dying beast, but enough for you to discern that it was a voice emitted by a human in an extreme moment. If it was you making this sound, you'd wish it was the last time in your life that you emitted a sound like that.

It wasn't going to happen for a second time, ever.... Even if he was still alive, Tsurumi probably would not have the chance to make that scream again, but he will have to settle down with the kind of life he will get after recovering from the consequences of this fight.

This sound was the ultimate, desperate attempt to tolerate a horrible injury that will affect not only his martial artist career for the rest of his life, but his regular life for as long as he'd live, which he could just suppose, it wasn't going to be long enough.

What Crazy Dog did, while he was holding Tsurumi, used his gigantic hand to grasp and press the back of Tsurumi's head.

Moreover, he launched and stuck his thick right index finger into Tsurumi's right nostril with all his strength, breaking muscle, bone and cartilage all the way to the edge. There was no mistake, That blow penetrated so deeply that it reached even his

throat.

Tsurumi continued to let out a strange noise, very similar to a dog that was being strangled to death. As if something was stuck in his throat. Crazy Dog released his left hand that was used to press the back of Tsurumi's head. Tsurumi was struggling, as if he was lifted up in the air and he was writing something on the ground.

His mouth was half-open and his body was trembling. His blood was overflowing everywhere and along with his jaw, it was dripping all over the ground.

“A pro-wrestler can get his hands dirty too.” Bunshichi remembered he heard that from Kajiwara.

“Mr. Himekawa...sir?” someone was calling from the darkness. Himekawa Tsutomu stood next to Bunshichi. Looking at the gruesome scene with stiff eyes. He would have preferred making his snarky

smile but his heart has become still as well.

“Mr. Himekawa?” A man came from the darkness and kept on calling him. It was the same man that made that phone call before when he was with Saeko.

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“Would you mind if I watch this fight quietly without intervening?”

“I don't care.” Himekawa responded.

Crazy Dog finally pulled out his finger and Tsurumi collapsed on his knees and his back. The city lights shone on Crazy Dog's index finger. It was glowing with shiny, wet red colors mixed with a little of black at the same time.

Crazy Dog opened his bloody mouth and sucked his finger making a loud sucking noise. Turning

around facing Tanba.

“I’m fighting you...” Himekawa whispered in the darkness while walking out to the light. He walked casually with his hands down on the sides.

“Disgusting white pig...” Himekawa muttered with a calm voice. Crazy Dog’s red face has turned even more redder.

In half a second, Himekawa charged all of a sudden!! The mad dog didn’t run away. Bunshichi was staring at Himekawa’s right hand the moment he made first contact with Crazy Dog. Himekawa and the mad dog clashed violently.

Because of the impact, Himekawa was blown far away to the back. Crazy dog moved forward with the same speed as Himekawa was flying to the back. Crazy Dog’s humongous body fell on Himekawa and it seem he was covering him completely. He could not move his body. Felt like a small mountain decided to sit on him. Himekawa

tried to get himself out from under him. He finally stood up and cleared out the dirt on his shirt.

“Puuhh...Is been a while, I tell you.” He looked at Bunshichi and smiled widely.

“Just now....” Bunshichi said while looking perplexed at Himekawa.

“Did you stab him!!?”

“You saw it, didn't you?”

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Himekawa asked him humorously, maybe Bunshichi missed it for a second.

Every part of the face, for as simple and strong as it may look, It carry a great deal of sensitivity and delicacy.

Even if you don't see it, it's the point intersecting the middle of our nose and upper lip. If you press softly enough, you'd feel the sensitivity. But the

harder you press, you will feel the pain and agony until you stop. If you were in a real combat situation, your body will make your vitals to hold in a tight spot, making them harder to reach. Doesn't matter what kind of person or his fighting background could be, if he or she see something flying to his or her face, the body will make all sorts of movements to avoid it. Any sort of small moves could protect these tiny vital spots.

“His opening attack was so simple, that, unless I did something flashy to distract him, nothing else would have worked as easy as that to take him down.” Himekawa said with a cool voice.

“So... You intended to defeat him from the start?”

“Yes.” Himekawa answered while looking at the man that was assisting him.

“Katou, please clean this up and get help for the injured. Mr. Kawabe should be at the Tokai

Kankou hotel as we speak, so you can call him there.”

“Yes, sir.” The man named Katou said. At that same time, there was a rustling sound nearby. It was Crazy Dog who was lying face-down like a small mountain, he moved his body slowly but surely, and got up.

“Pro-wrestlers are a people without a pattern, don't you think so, Bunshichi?” Himekawa asked.

“That's quite impressive.” he added shortly thereafter.

Bunshichi was mysteriously impressed too. It was amazing to see someone who was able to stand up after getting one of his vital points violently smashed in such a way, he didn't think there could be people like that.

Crazy dog stumbled a bit but he was able to get up. Bunshichi and Himekawa were looking at that immense body of his while Crazy Dog turned around. He did it slowly as if he was searching for Bunshichi and the others. While he turned, it was visible that his nose was twisted in an unnatural way. He looked at Bunshichi and Himekawa with pale eyes.

Himekawa walked towards Crazy Dog with a relaxed walk and he even stood in front of him.

Crazy Dog did not move, that was when Himekawa lifted up his right hand, lowered down his hip and slightly hit Crazy Dog's chest with his palm. Crazy Dog's giant body fell down defeated and stumbled down on his back. This time, though, Crazy Dog remained immobile for the rest of the time they were there.

“So, shall we go, then?” Said Himekawa with a

big smile looking at Bunshichi.

“Go? Go where?” Bunshichi asked, puzzled.

“Isn't your “friend” waiting for you on the other side?” When Himekawa said it, Bunshichi made an expression as if he just realized that there was somebody waiting for him, and Himekawa was waiting for them too.

“That's right.” Bunshichi said quietly with a small smile. “Let's go”

CHAPTER IX

The wind blew strongly. It seemed that the coastal wind that came from the ocean had gotten a little stronger. Blowing over treetops without leaves, these haven't grown yet in this season, but, in the dark, the branches were making a faint wind noise in the atmosphere. Two shadows were emerging from the dark road. These were Bunshichi walking along Himekawa on his left side.

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Both men, Bunshichi and Himekawa, were walking silently. Drawn into the darkness ahead, Bunshichi knew he was walking to the place where Kajiwara was waiting for him, but he sensed something different within him.

His sense of excitement was overloaded. He loved to fight and there was nothing in this world that could excite him more than to face Kajiwara. But instead, there was a strange sense of mental fatigue. He felt that he used already the best of him.

He wondered what else he would do if he were to win this fight...even though he didn't have the usual burning fighting spirit that brimmed in his body and launched him to battle. He didn't want to fight.

"I was scared." He remembered what Kajiwara told him. Wasn't that enough to satisfy him?

He wondered about that himself, but he still couldn't come up with an answer, he didn't understand.

When he met him, he could have shake his hand, invite him to a few drinks, laugh about a few stories about his pro-wrestling matches...If he did that....What would have been the insult of it, then? Why did they fight? Why do they have to fight for now? Bunshichi was trying to find the reason why they had to fight inside his head.

He visualized the faces of the men he had been fighting so far until now. His eyes were as if they were questioning something within his hunger for

fighting. The gruesome scene of his best friend defeated, the face of Saito covered in blood blurred by his own tears, floated in his mind. He remembered the scene when Saito was fighting very well. What was the name of the man that killed him? He could not remember that. It was “Kijima” but he already forgot that. He could only remember his face before and after being beaten up mercilessly by him.

But then, Kajiwara's face would show up, unbeatable, angry, powerful. He could have destroyed him. He didn't, nobody knows why even today. His face kept showing up, never the loser, never the defeated.

Better think in somebody else, who else was there? Ryoji Kubo, that kid that was so impressed that begged him to be his friend, his sharp eyes trying to crack the secret of Bunshichi's fighting ability, there was also Izumi Souichiro's face. A kind and wise person that accepted his reckless challenge. Faces, different faces, angry faces, sad faces. They

wouldn't stop invading his mind and unloading a burden heavier than the last. They were tossing them at Bunshichi's back without caring if he was able to carry them all, at all.

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He felt that his hands and legs were getting heavy.
“What's wrong? Are you alright?” Himekawa asked a bit concerned.

“It's nothing.” Bunshichi responded.
“Your body can't feel the excitement, huh!?”
“No, that's not it.” Bunshichi answered that, and within his mind, he answered to himself the same.
“It all will come back, explode and burn once I see him.” that's what he thought.

“It's truly a damn shame, isn't it?” Himekawa asked with a slightly pessimistic tone.
“What!?”

“I was looking forward to that, I thought I'd be the person who'll defeat you.”

“Are you saying that I'm going to lose against Kajiwara?”

“Yes.”

That can't be, Bunshichi thought to himself “what the hell this guy is talking about? I'm not the same guy that I was six years ago.”

Bunshichi heard the sounds of the twigs being pushed gently by the wind. They kept walking at a relaxed pace until Himekawa stopped walking and stood right there. The trees in front of him blocked Bunshichi's view but about thirty feet ahead of him, something was moving in the dark. The night city lights nearby illuminated a formidable figure of a strong man doing some push-ups.

“Your friend is here, waiting for you.” Himekawa

said.

Kajiwara stopped moving at once, he rose up slowly while looking at Bunshichi. He moved forward and stopped a few meters before him. Kajiwara took on the same expression, raw ferocity, the first time he met Bunshichi at the Toyoo Pro-Wrestling Gym.



At that time, he came up from the shower room, at the moment he looked at Bunshichi's eyes; he thought he had the fight in his pocket because he was weak.

“Hey!!” Kajiwara spoke with a low and raspy voice.

If you were to stare into Kajiwara now, there is more in that “Hey” than any roar or scream uttered in the fighting streets of men and boys. A menacing look and a fierce sound, enough to shut anyone down, one would allow their muscles to release their suspended anxiety the moment he diverted his eyes, but it was followed by the loudest of

silences. He was looking at Bunshichi now, it was the loudest sound.

“Are you sick or something? What's wrong?”
Kajiwara demanded an answer.

“Nothing.” Bunshichi answered quietly.

This is what he wanted all along. He made it all the way here. His graven soul was waiting for six years, the heaviest of hearts was what he was left with. Quitting was damn well out of the question.

“Let's fight...” Bunshichi bellowed. He gave a deep breath, lowered his waist, the hesitation dissipated.

He was ready.

PART V: EVIL BEAST

THE END.

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FINAL PART

EPILOGUE: CHAPTER I

"Damn, shit, fuck!! Pisses me off!!" These words were repeating over and over in Ryoji's head. He was having a really hard time containing his anger. The fact that Bunshichi abandoned him after such an important fight felt like a betrayal and there were no immediate options or alternate plans to

ease his frustration.

He started wandering hopelessly around the hotel and finally decided to walk around Chinatown. Once he arrived there, he started searching for dark streets and hidden corners but the only shady street he found was a very unpleasant narrow alley filled with suspicious men loitering, drinking, laughing. One guy was circling his arm around a woman

and you could tell he wasn't doing it for free . Another was vomiting behind a post. The tobacco and cheap booze smell reeked around the area. With all the lights and questionable businesses that cater to the night life, Yokohama appeared to be like a giant, intimidating maze. There was even a small dark river that wasn't smelling much better either.

For the second time, the Toukai Kankou hotel received a phone call asking if Kajiwara had

returned and it was answered with the same words as the first. "He wasn't returned yet, sir."

Sick of wandering the streets, Ryoji returned to the hotel with the small hope that Tanba would be there but he wasn't.

He was loitering in the bar and in the lobby and after a short while, he was back in the street.

"What the fuck, I don't wanna start crying for this."

Ryoji was feeling desperate and in his brisk walking, he started bumping into some people several times. They insulted him with harsh words and pushed him away but he cared little for what they said or do, only spitting in the ground in response. The desperation was getting the best of him.

He kept advancing until he bumped head on into someone that was big and burly. Ryoji fell on the floor but the tall figure didn't move and just kept looking at him.

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“The fuck is your problem, dude!!?” Ryoji screamed to the tall man that had shiny eyes and a perplexed look.

But before standing up, he noticed something familiar about this man. He knew him. His tone of voice changed immediately.

“Ohh!! You're the mighty Ox, Ushio Date.” he said while standing up and dusting himself a little.

“ I knew it was you right away, what other kid would have the balls to bump into me like that?”

“ Mr. Date, would you happen to know where my old bro could be right now?”

“Who are you talking about?”

“My old bro...”

“You mean Bunshichi Tanba?”

“Yes sir. The asshole went ahead and left me behind.”

“Wait, do you mean Bunshichi came all the way to Yokohama?”

“He came here to fight Kajiwara, That's why he left me behind. Probably he thought I would get in the way.”

“Tanba came to Yokohama....to fight Kajiwara?...” His voice thickened. “Do you know any places he could be right now?”

“I have no idea, even Kajiwara hasn't returned to his hotel yet, I called there a few times.” When Ryoji mentioned that, Date groaned as if he was expecting a bad outcome.

“That man sure is packing bad intentions within his hands. He's quite aggressive” Date said shaking

his head with a small grin on his face.

“I don't know what to say, I really don't know this place.” Ryoji mentioned sounding a little bit defeated.

After a brief moment, Date seemed to remember something.

“ I was wondering if Tanba maybe is planning to ambush him in Yamashita park.”

“Isn't that place quite far from where Kajiwara is staying?”

“Kajiwara is an idiot. He loves to jog from there to the hotel after a performance. He did that in his opening night too. It just makes him happy to run from all the way from there, I guess.”

“Where's Yamashita park!!?” Ryoji started walking fast, away from Date, even though he

didn't know where it was.

"This way, Follow me!!" Date started running and he was quickly followed by Ryoji.

"That idiot!! Wait until I find him!"

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Ryoji's resentment and anger were growing as he ran. He was never good at managing his emotions.

EPILOGUE: CHAPTER II

Bunshichi could hear the wind wafting through a cherry tree branch that was on top of his head, it was coming directly from the ocean. There was a salty scent in the air. Maybe it was the smell of the

tide mixed with other vegetation from the landscape. But it was an intense, warm salty air that was reaching Bunshichi's nose.

He noticed something strange in the ocean smell this time, for some reason it felt...Human?

Suddenly he realized that it was his own sweat, not from the earlier fight definitely. It was fresh sweat pouring since he started the fight against Kajiwara. Kajiwara was standing about fifteen feet away from him and he still hadn't made a fighting stance yet, but his eyes were following him much like a serpent.

Bunshichi also had not made a fighting stance yet. He simply lowered his waist and said "Let's fight..."

But nobody had made a significant move yet since he mentioned those words. In Bunshichi's head there were two questions running in his head. "What kind of position will he use?" "Which move

will he use to start the fight?"

He was trying desperately to figure out the answer to start the fight with a counter rather than a first blood attack.

"Damn!! Is he going to kick!!? Maybe a feint low kick? I'm sure he'll try to grapple me in some way"

Pro wrestlers have this particular stance when they're trying to kick, but their kicks aren't really that powerful. If they want to launch a serious kick, they need to have a proper stance, order of movement and balance to achieve it.

"No, he's not going for it." Bunshichi thought.

In this kind of place, a simple wrestler can be really dangerous by taking advantage of his usual throwing and slamming techniques. Wrestlers don't

train just for the sake of getting back on their feet after they've been slammed with a back-drop or a body-slam. They also trained for the purpose of minimizing the impact of such techniques used on the ring.

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The elasticity of the mat always absorbed the damage of the impact. For example, if a wrestler is challenged and this fight happens on concrete or the floor of a Karate Dojo, The victory most likely would be settled as soon as somebody received the first body slam. If it was the case of somebody landing with the back of their head due to a back-drop, the fight would have been over in an instant. Kajiwara only had that particular advantage in this fight.

Kajiwara started to sink his waist slowly. Gently lifting up his arms, his hands were wide open. Leaving a big gap between his hands and the center of his body. Moving his arms back and forth , It was the traditional pro wrestler stance.

Bunshichi felt a cold shiver at the base of his spine making ripples in his back. He held his fists and slowly moved closer to him while catching the rhythm with his elbows. His focus was clear and he felt confident in his condition and abilities but, for some reason, he felt a void inside his heart.

All that rage and hatred towards Kajiwara was now gone but no, that was not accurate. The hatred was still burning inside of him but it wasn't for Kajiwara. That void in his chest was rolling down like a boulder inside his body.

For the last six years he has been hungry for fighting, eagerly waiting to settle this fight.

“Could it be that...?” Bunshichi thought to himself.

“ If the opponent wasn't Kajiwara, I wouldn't have felt this void in my chest. The cells in my body would have been happy and I would have been feeling goosebumps to stand in front of my opponent and enjoy the throw down.”

The distance towards Kajiwara had become much smaller. His body gave a sensitive reaction toward his opponent movements.

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Kajiwara was protecting his chin and the left side of his face with the back of his right hand and trying to create some distance because he knew about Bunshichi's high kick and he was being

cautious about it.

He lightly moved his left hand forward with an open palm. The distance kept decreasing.

“Shuuuh!!” Bunshichi let out a sharp breath while launching a low kick aiming at Kajiwara's left leg while it was drawing a short arc. Kajiwara received the blow with his left knee and he did it accurately. Right when Kajiwara lifted his knee, he could see Bunshichi telegraphing his movements. He started laughing about it.



Aiming at that laugh, Bunshichi hit him with a right punch which Kajiwara blocked it beautifully with his left arm.

Following that attack, Bunshichi kept launching low and medium kicks with both legs. He wasn't

aiming at any particular point. He just wanted a chance to let some good attacks land on his opponent.

His head, shoulder, abdomen, the legs, the knees....

Bunchishi kept attacking every single part of the human body possible but Kajiwara was able to block every single attack masterfully. He even got surprised when Kajiwara dared to let one of his mid-high kicks land on his back on purpose without much effect.

“Heahhhhh” Kajiwara let out a sound that much resembled a serpent. Kicking the ground hard, he launched an attack that had Bunchishi stepping back and cramping his back for a moment.

With his free foot, Kajiwara aimed at Bunshichi's abdomen like a serpent and after landing that, that slick serpent goose-neck was searching to smash Bunshichi's nose. That was a very intense kick. To be honest, that was the kind of blow that you would shatter somebody's jaw easily. Not too long ago he had used that fast kick on some unlucky sap in the ring and the result was inevitable.

Usually, the pro-wrestler kick cannot be compared in power to superior kicks like the Karatekas or Muay Thai boxers. They are nowhere near as powerful. For starters, they don't lift high enough. Compared to their opponent stances, you can't possibly kick their heads if you are a pro wrestler. Unfortunately, for Tanba, Kajiwara was different from the rest.

He had such a gift for kicks that if he launched a

front high kick to an opponent, most likely the impact would reach to the back of his head.

“Talk about prolific...” Bunchishi thought to himself. With a kick of such caliber, Kajiwara could leave a burning smell in the air. Let alone getting hit by it.

The chance opened itself for him. Bunshichi was aiming for Kajiwara's left foot and kicked him with all his might. That's when Kajiwara upper body started shaking. With the same kick, Bunshichi was aiming for Kajiwara's head and continued the attack. However, that kick didn't land on Kajiwara's head. Kajiwara lifted his left arm and blocked that blow. Then, he trapped Bunshichi's right foot in his left armpit.

This time, the target was Bunshichi's pivotal leg. Before that, Bunshichi jumped with his right foot

and kicked Kajiwara's right side of the head with his left foot. Sinking his head, Kajiwara avoided that attack and left Bunshichi kicking air. Then, he put the weight on Bunshichi's leg that he was holding all along. Bunshichi slammed the ground with his right shoulder first.

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Had he slammed the ground with his right hand, the damage would have been considerable and the broken bones would have left him exposed and defeated. At this moment, it was obvious that Kajiwara was aiming to damage Bunshichi's right Achilles tendon, but, in between that momentum, Bunshichi recovered from the slam and tried to kick Kajiwara's head while on the ground, However, Kajiwara was able to block with his

right hand. Somehow, Kajiwara's strength had become slightly loose.

Bunshichi flipped his body horizontally. Pulling his right leg, he kicked Kajiwara's stomach with his left foot. Kajiwara tried to block it with both his arms. It slipped out. Kneeling down, Kajiwara tried to do a takedown on Bunshichi that was still trying to get up. He had gotten into his chest. Bunshichi desperately tried to use both his elbows and planted them repetitively on Kajiwara's shoulders that were as tough as big rocks and boulders. However his posture wasn't good enough and his blows had no effect at all.

He had been finally brought down to his back and he was pressed from above. Kajiwara seized his left wrist with his hand. He was trying to pull an arm lock of some sort. Bunshichi regretted it. He should have run away before he had gotten into that situation. His back was shaking violently, while

carrying Kajiwara's weight on his chest, he tried to get himself up from the ground. This was a pro wrestling bridge.

Suddenly, Bunshichi made an impressive human arch with his body. It seemed that in between that desperate struggle, he had swallowed some dirt and pebbles from the ground. Kajiwara sighed.

Using his forehead as fulcrum, Bunshichi twisted his own body and in that way he was able to free himself from the arm lock. But this didn't happen without damage as Bunshichi's forehead was bleeding and the open wound had some pebbles and dirt mixed with the open skin. But this was a small price to pay in exchange for seizing Kajiwara's arm. It was Bunshichi's time to get some payback with ground fighting of his own.

During the moment when he took Kajiwara's right arm, they were able to stand side-by-side. That's when Kajiwara and Bunshichi's eyes meet one another.

“Heh, Heh...”

Kajiwara laughed. While he was still laughing, he approached his forehead to Bunshichi and “Bang!!” he gave him a strong head-butt right between his nose and mouth. He managed to get even closer and “Bang!!” he landed another one. Bunshichi felt a warm river fell from his nose. It was blood.

“Bang!!” for the third time, the rugged forehead found his mark for a head-butt. For the fourth time Bunshichi released his right hand and tried to nab Kajiwara with his right fist. Surprisingly enough, he was able to land a good one on Kajiwara's nose tip.

After that heated exchange, both men tumbled and competed with each other on the ground. Their look was almost the same. Both of them with bloody faces with some mud and bruises all around. It was a muddled and frightening fight. Little by little, slowly and gradually, both of them managed to increase the damage done to each other. If we were to compare them to their first fight. One would say that they became more persistent this time. Much like two serpents battling and trying to entangle each other. Those who would have watched the fight once would not be able to tell which person attacked whom. It would have to be filmed to be analyzed. There were occasions when the person on top was in more pain than the person on the bottom because their faces got distorted.

But as you can see, there were neither lights nor spectators who could bear witness to this dirty spectacle.

Himekawa was the only person who watched the fight. He watched them fight with a smile so big, his fine nostrils were expanding a little. His delicate face had this delighted look of someone finally finding a treasure that he sought for so long.

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EPILOGUE: CHAPTER III

The wind was blowing from the ocean. The twigs and branches were making an eerie sound within the darkness and silhouettes of Yamashita park. Two dark shadows were running frantically and emerged from the trees.

It was Date and Ryoji. Along the trail, Date suddenly stopped and his nose wriggled a little.

“What's wrong, Mr. Date?” Ryoji asked and looking worried.

“This is strange, I smell blood.” Date answered back.

“Blood, you say?”

“No matter how little blood there's around, I can smell it and it always stinks ”. Date started walking faster.

Ryoji followed him not too far behind, he kept the pace. In an instant, both of them stopped when they saw three men lying down in the dark. Two of them were under a cherry tree. The man that was resting in the trunk of the cherry tree looked like he was in severe pain and just got defeated. Groaning constantly, the other was just resting down, it felt that they were so injured and weak.

But the person away from the cherry tree looked like a mountain, he didn't make any sounds.

“Hell, this is Crazy Dog.” Date said while walking towards him.

“What the hell happened in here!!?” Date asked the one that was semi conscious resting on the trunk.

Shimura, that sustained an injury when his wrist got bent by Bunshichi, was looking at Date in pain. He realized he was talking to someone from Toyoo pro wrestling .

“He defeated me.” he groaned in shame.

“Defeated you? Who?”

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“Bunshichi did. He defeated both of us but the big

guy over there was defeated by Himekawa.” He kept talking but due to the pain, he was having difficulty breathing.

“Himekawa?” It seemed that it was the first time Date heard that name.

“I think Katou left to call Kawabe.”

“I see...”

“But I need to tell you, I think the police and the ambulance might come here soon, there was a couple that saw us and left in a hurry, probably they called them...” Shimura could say just so much until he got interrupted by Ryoji.

“I don't have time, tell me where is Kajiwara and my old bro Tanba now!!”

“They're over there...”

“Ahh! Shit!!” Ryoji ran towards the darkness and didn't look back.

“Hey, if you help me out, we'll be able to move this dude closer to here” Date said, Looking at the giant.

“What!!?”

“Whatever, just get lost.”

“We will never be able to move this giant dude to a bench.”

“He'll have to walk by himself.” Date said.

“No shit.”

“Tsk...” Date spit to the ground.

“He got beat up pretty bad.” Date kicked Crazy Dog's cheek with his shoe. Shimura was looking at him with a disgusted look in his face and Crazy Dog started groaning a little while his giant body started moving.

“It is hard to believe the monster has finally been defeated.” Murmured Shimura.

Shimura stood up, He helped Tsurumi stand up with his right hand and put Tsurumi's arm on his shoulder.

“Shit!!” Date kicked Crazy Dog's groin area but he didn't notice, he just groaned a little.

Surprised by it, Crazy Dog lifted up his hip and yelled “Ugh!! Damn it...” He murmured under his breath.

Grabbing him by the collar, Date told him “If you still want to fight in Japan's rings, you'll do exactly as I say...”

“First, you'll get up and walk on your own, even if you have to crawl, you'll call Kawabe on your cellphone or find a nice Taxi drive that's kind enough to give you a ride to the hospital...”

Hearing this, Crazy Dog tried to lift himself up

without avail. Date really started getting worried that he'd get involved in some mess he had no business to begin with, until he heard a couple of footsteps behind him and a familiar raspy voice.

“Date...you're here...” It was Kawabe.

“Isn't it fun when shit hits the fan?” Date said jokingly.

“This is horrible...” Kawabe said in a serious voice. “Being a victim of a hit and run.”

“ What!?” Date got confused.

“Crazy Dog was run over by a car and the driver got away...If that's the case.” Kawabe said determined.

“Sure, that's what it was...” Date smiled and nodded.

“Now, where are Tanba and Kajiwara...?” Kawabe asked while looking around.

“I'll take care of it, leave them to me.”

“Can I trust you?”

“Come on Old Kawabe, I've been in the wrestling world longer than you, I just retired last year but I still can pull my strings just fine.

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“Alright...” Kawabe nodded and picked Crazy Dog up from the ground.

“Had I knew it was going to turn like this, I would have had someone smaller to do this.”

“Well, you have to leave now. Someone already called the cops about the fights and the injured in this area, I'll see you around.” Date said while running toward the place where Bunshichi was.

EPILOGUE: CHAPTER IV

Ryoji found both men entangled in a fierce battle. He couldn't say or do anything but watch with a sad face how this fight was going to end. It wasn't exciting, he felt that he was about to cry. At his side was Himekawa Tsutomu admiring the fight with the same faint smile and delighted look. His eyes were absentminded. Much like when someone stops for a while to admire a beautiful thing that cannot see everyday. The ocean wind fluttered Himekawa's long black hair sideways giving him a majestic look. From inside his mouth, Ryoji Kubo kept whispering pleads to Bunshichi to stop.

“Come on, Old bro, this is enough...”

He wanted to jump in the middle and stop this nonsense and get him to a safe place.
“Why do these two have to fight so bitterly? For

what reason?" He had seen the enjoyment of Bunshichi's street fights many times before. But this time, he wasn't enjoying this match. It was sad, it was painful. Much like seeing your best friend being tortured in front of you. Ryoji almost couldn't contain his tears watching the fight.

He always enjoyed watching him fighting, watching anybody fighting. It was the first time that he hated this fight. It was painful to watch and he couldn't wait for it to stop.

While punching and kicking Kajiwara, Bunshichi felt that he was receiving the same amount of pain that he was inflicting to his opponent. He also noticed the damage and pressure in his own joints when he was targeting the same joints of Kajiwara. It also seemed that he could experience Kajiwara's pain when he attacked him.

It was the strange experience of feeling that his body and Kajiwara's were connected by a mysterious bond that made them feel the same, the same pain, the same feelings, the same sadness. Almost like a mirror.

The more he tried to attack Kajiwara, the more he was tormenting himself. Ryoji sensed this. He wanted to desperately be the beacon that would bring Bunshichi back to his reality. He stopped caring. He let his tears roll down his cheeks.

“Bro, that's enough!!” Ryoji yelled. “This fight has to stop!!”

The light of the moon was reflected in Ryoji's tears. He was so distraught that he didn't notice that Date was standing next to him and his feet felt like they were almost nailed to the ground.

The martial arts stopped, the fighting spirit was gone. What remained was the void and the loneliness of two men hurling weak blows and empty attacks at each other. Mixed with the mud and blood. Everything was fading away into nothingness...

You could hear Ryoji's screams in the wind. You could also hear the sirens of police in the distance getting closer and closer. The sound of the ocean crashing onto the shore was gradually being overtaken by the familiar sound of sirens and the flashes of blue and red were getting closer and closer.

Those screams, sounds and colors were supposed to reach Bunshichi and Kajiwara ears and eyes.... But no, it might not reach them after all.

“Come on, bro!!” Ryoji kept screaming.

But Bunshichi did not move. He did not win the battle that day, in fact, neither did Kajiwara. There was nothing to win, probably never was... and never will...

An unbearable loneliness had stuck in Bunshichi's face. He had fought with himself.

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*AFTERWORD by Yumemakura
Baku*

If you have been reading my books for a while, you'll notice that this is my first novel attempt that doesn't include any science-fiction, magical or occult elements. Why is that, you might ask? Well...

"I got two strong guys here, which one of them is stronger?" The theme is quite simple, yet fascinating. I always wanted to write stories about martial artists someday and this is one of them. I was always wondering "Why is it that nobody want to write stories about the modern Miyamoto Musashi?" The wandering man that wanted to test his might and skill without having to involve himself in a tale of self redemption or "rescue the girl". Just test himself for the sake of fighting enjoyment? Why is it that when we say "a martial arts novel" it always has to involve a psychic, a CIA agent or some sort of military or magical reborn Kung-Fu guy? Why can't they focus on an ordinary swordsman story? They're always a

private investigator Karate expert or a criminal that's just good at Judo. Why does nobody ever bother to write a story of a simple fighter or somebody that just uses Karate as their main protagonist?

It doesn't mean that there has never been "good novels with combat themes in it" I just thought that the story about the modern Miyamoto Musashi would be a little different in these times.

How about the story about the modern "Sugata Sanshiro" then?

I have to say in Japanese comic "Manga" form, there are a lot of them. My favorite is "Karate Baka Ichidai" (Karate for life, A Crazy Karate life. In USA is known as "Karate Master" on HULU) there's also "The Karate from hell" (Karate Jigokuhen) and "The Karate Three Kingdoms" (Karate Sengoku) Finally edited into separate volumes.

How did they know that we needed stories like

that? Who told them??

In my case, when it come to stories about fighters, you just can't ignore or leave pro wrestling behind. But how was I was going to integrate pro wrestling to the “Modern Miyamoto” story? I know how people with common sense have a specific vision about pro wrestling.

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“It's a show”, ”it's fake”, ”It's scripted”, ”It's arranged”, ”It's just a fight between Yakuza” etc.... We don't know whether it's true or not but there's nothing that it can be done if people think about it in that way.

After all, there's no mistake in saying that the world of pro wrestling is marred in sorrow. I like pro wrestling, Karate and Kick-boxing, but I'm just an amateur that has never experienced them directly. But for sure. I'm also a fan of the

Miyamoto Musashi story, who would fight people in “one against one” kind of matches.

I should probably write a story about that. About an amateur fighter that likes to challenge other skilled people in “one versus one” fights. And so, this became the theme for this book.

And I became very satisfied with the theme too. It got me thinking “Is there a person that would care more about expressing stubbornness rather than fighting scenes and scores?” I’m sure there must be someone strange like that.

There should not be a win-loss situation between Bunshichi and Kajiwara when they fought for the first time either.

I really wanted to mention this in the book. Inside the book, there's still someone who could have become a wrestler a few years later even if they weren't born from the pro wrestling organization called the UWF. If you haven't watched the fight between Super Tiger and a wrestler called Fujiwara Yoshiaki, but still want a clearer

explanation concerning the UWF, Technically, they were formed earlier than when this book was written. If you cannot see their technical composition of “Kicks and joint locks” you would not be able to write a book about it.

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About the other fighting scenes in this book, for those who are familiar with the Japanese pro wrestling and Karate world would probably remember and quote them when they read this book. There might be inspiration for such scenes in the surface but remember that this book is my literary creation and I did not mean offense to current fighting organization or actual persons.

There's something I need to confess though. This book will not end in this volume, originally there was a plan to end this book in a single volume but I get a bad habit on falling in love with my good

stories and it get longer and longer the more I write and the more people ask me to make more out of them.

This story would probably be over in three volumes, at least, that's the plan.

What kind of moves would Tanba use against experts of different martial arts? Boxing? Kung-Fu? Aikido? Even sumo!!? wow, there's such a vast world that sometimes I can't keep my eyes closed just thinking what is he going to find next. The more I think about it, the more exciting it gets!!!

Ah, It's happening again as we speak. I'm not sure if I already got it but I think I have developed a stomach ulcer. Somehow when my stomach is empty. I'll feel the pain right away. When I start writing the manuscript, I feel my stomach turning upside down. And when I grab my stomach with both my hands, I feel my hands are tied up. I can even see the creamy yellow gastric juice when I

vomit. Until last year, any time it happened, I would not force myself too much and I would fill my stomach right away. Somehow I managed to do something about it. But this time it was not the case. I did not have appetite and food could not seem to reach my stomach. Even if I forced myself to eat, I would throw up right away. On top of it, for the past month, I felt that this situation would never end. Even when I went to see the doctor, I would not get better. Even if I coughed my lungs out, I would still not stop coughing. From my throat came a voice that was at the verge of dying. It was painful, I was in tears. When I coughed, I felt that I was trying to force my lungs to breath in some air. It was a terrible situation for me. Moreover, it was really painful for my lungs to breathe in the air that was piled up in my stomach. My tongue would get tense and saliva started coming out. I would not speak for at least an hour.

And just like that, it turned into a real stomach ulcer. I had to cancel the fishing trip that I was looking forward to because I couldn't stand the pain. In the middle of the night, I had to get out of the hotel because it hurt so much. I was going to go for a walk and breathe some fresh air because I couldn't sleep and finally I decided to go to the hospital when I started coughing and my stomach killed me every time I cough. The pain was way too intense.

Once I arrived, the doctor ordered me to take some Barium and took an X-ray of my stomach and I figured the cause why I got this stomach ulcer... I've been working too hard.

It used to be that I would finish my manuscripts during the night. I always work better overnight and I would go to sleep in the morning. But this time, I couldn't finish the second page of it. I forced myself to eat something to get some energy but to no avail. I just couldn't continue. Finishing the second page and with so many ideas and

enthusiasm to write. I had to quit and I got sad because of it. In the morning, once again, I rushed to the hospital. I did my best to get better but I still failed and I let a lot of people down but had my body not started screaming at this moment. I would still have pushed myself to this sad state after pouring so many ideas on my pages.

I was stuck in bed. I felt a lot of things that were escaping from my body here and there, High fever, shoulder pain, my neck pain was so bad I couldn't turn it even if I wanted. The gums from my back tooth started swelling and even though I could touch my cheek softly, The pain was horrible and almost unbearable. As if I was pushing invisible nails, those suckers that you couldn't see but you feel the real pain behind them!! Even swallowing spit would give me a painful vibration. I open my mouth and the muscles between my teeth turned black. Even if I chew a small gran of rice would give me considerable pain. Sincerely I can't wait until I'm better so I can eat something else beside warm soup.

Why is he writing this? You might ask, I had the great idea that writing about it would ease the pain a little but is not the case, it hurts even more.

Another idea of mine that doesn't work. When it comes to our bodies, we must be humble and not overconfident. We can't muscle out the pain every single time. We never know when we will become sick and weak. For us, humans, we can't stay sick for much longer. Getting sick sucks. I think I heard someone say once "Everyone has their own limits" so I tell you, once you feel you reached your limit, just do what you can. You are not doing yourself favors by running until you're dead. Stay healthy and give up once in a while. You are not going to win all your battles in this life anyway.

Anyway, to end this volume in a good note, let's me tell you a little of what's coming next. In Volume 2,

Tanba will meet Matsuo Shozan. How would they find each other? What would be their reaction? I keep visualizing the scenes in my mind but I can't write them right now. I want to start writing so bad. You will really enjoy it.

Please look forward to it, I promise you that, from Volume 1 to Volume 3 I won't let you down.

Until we meet again.

Showa period, year 60, June 13th of 1985. In Odawara.

Yumemakura Baku.

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GAROUDEN COMMENTARY by
Jirou Kitaue (chief editor of Futabasha action
novels)

A few years ago, I wrote a small review on the novel “Chimera” by Yumemakura Baku. The words "deep, dazzling, and sad" came to mind immediately. That's what I was thinking the whole time I was writing the review.

The story was superb, the characters were dazzling and sparkling, the plot was deep and all that was great but why did I find it sad?

I thought about it, even after re-reading “Garouden” a couple of times, I still can't understand why there was sadness in a Yumemakura Baku action novel. So this time, I'd like to take the opportunity to write about it. From his first short stories "Nekohiko no Oruorane" to his popular series “Chimera” and “Yamigari shi” (Leader of demon hunters) Yumemakura Baku works are always “One step close to reality”. When you think about it, the characteristics that he bring to the table is always the perfect mixture of fantasy and reality. The fact that nowadays people tend to separate what is “fantasy” and what is “believable as fiction” and he comes and create a “Hard fantasy” is absolutely astounding, his stories are truly unique.

From his purely fantastical work of "Nekohiko no Oruorane" his standpoint was clear. Then he started “Chimera” and “Yamigari shi” and he started cementing his reputation as a talented fantasy writer.

But starting in 1985, he seemed to hang his “Fantasy” coat and started work on “Garouden” and “Shishi no mon”

To give you a better example, this was written in the original first edition of “Garouden volume I” (published by Futabasha in 1985. [for the english version we're using and quoting the pages of “The Bound Volume I” a 2006 omnibus edition]

----“For Yumemakura Baku, this is the first attempt as a profesional author to write a novel without adding any science-fiction or fantastical elements from the occult.”----

The plot was quite simple: There's a strong man “Bunshichi Tanba” that likes to fight, but six years ago he was defeated by a pro wrestler by the name of “Toshio Kajiwara” and since then, he has been dreaming of confronting him again.

He continued his training and finally after countless battles, he was finally able to fight Toshio Kajiwara six years later at Yamashita park when both men were at their peak of their abilities. When you summarize the story in a few lines, you might think we're misleading you in some way, but no, that's pretty much the whole story.

Of course there were other interesting characters like Ryoji Kubo, a boy that idolizes Tanba. The founder of the strongest Karate School in Japan “Matsuo Shozan” and his top disciple, a mysterious man called “Himekawa Tsutomu” and Kawabe from the Toyoo pro-wrestling group, the employee of a man known as “The Great Tatsumi”. However, if this story doesn't have fantastical settings or Sci-Fi elements like his previous works, the only thing he would be able to focus in his writing is Tanba's frustrations and flashbacks leading to the climatic final fighting scene.

He also mentioned that he wanted to work in the “modern Miyamoto Musashi story” and wondered why nobody had tried it before besides the “action manga guys” Only authors like Yumemakura Baku wonder about such things and henceforth he was inspired to craft such a unique physical fighting novel.

“Simple plot?” as if, A very deep story. Just look at the fighting scenes, didn't you get excited just reading about it? Were the scenes repeating in your mind both in slow motion and sometimes as fast as a flash?

However, there was also sadness in this novel, for example, when you finished reading the end of the climax of the battle against Kajiwara, were you cheering for his final victory or suddenly you felt you might want to cry? Why?

There's a number of hints regarding to this, first, the final line of the novel “He had fought with himself.” means that; because “Garouden” is a

fighting novel, the meaning of sorrow cannot be solved. That's all it is.

“Fukkatsuru Machi” is a long collaborative novel series where the main character “Karura Bunkichi” earns his living by betting on Shogi. This doesn't mean that there has never been a novel that featured Shogi as a theme. But this isn't a “Biography” or a “Mystery” novel. It doesn't even show you the scores of the games. This “Karura Bunkichi” is the father of “Karura Bumpei” who appears in “Shishi No Mon”. That Bumpei also appears here, also “Hikoroku Hashiba” too. To the delight of fans, the author makes a cross-over between “Fukkatsuru Machi” and “Shishi no Mon” and they'll be happy to read about it but, actually, “Fukkatsuru Machi” is an unimaginable fighting novel of a man who is obsessed with Shogi.

What kind of novel is “Fukkatsuru no Machi”? All we can say is “about fighting” the fighting obviously happens in a board with pieces. “What kind of rook will he use?” “What kind of moves will he counter?” “How will he counter this?” “He lost once to this guy, will he get beaten again?” “With what tactics?”. It is a suffocating fight that is developed on a board. It is a “one of a kind” story. But if you care little about Shogi rules and traps and just want the “pure fighting” then you need to go and read its twin novel “Garouden” It is an extremely miraculous novel.

When it comes to “Garouden” I understand it perfectly. For starters, it's a novel about men that are strong, skilled fighters and naturally they bump on each other while being drunk on the fame, fortune, lights, the applause of the masses or simply the adrenaline of a combat situation. If Yumemakura Baku were to do a “Shogi” series, he

still would use “pure fighting” as his core and would make it about Strong men bumping on each other. I've never seen an author like him. But this is the greatest hint.

Look at “Moushuu no Kaze” a novel story that has been compiled in “Fukkatsuru no Machi” Onita Keisuke is an amateur Shogi player that cannot become pro because of the restriction on age limits, but still dreams on breaking those age barriers and becoming a pro. In the word “fighting” that Yumemakura often writes in his novels it is the keyword to solve this problem.

How can he do it?

Onita doesn't want fortune or fame, Onita wants to become a pro because he could not find worthy opponents among the other amateurs. He was the strongest. Moreover, Onita was looking for a stronger opponent, which means, going pro was the only solution. However, the road to become a pro has closed for him forever and Onita's moment of suffering began there.

In “Garouden” Bunshichi was hoping to fight the wrestler Kajiwara but Toyoo pro wrestling wouldn't let him due to the so called "organization wall." But Tanba is a hero that desires to fight with strong people wherever, whenever. Garouden is the quintessential “pure fighting” novel, nonetheless, physical body and bare flesh are not the only context of his work. If you want something of the “fighting genre” then a novel like “Fukkatsuru no Machi” would be good for you. The point is not the physical body, there's also the point that the character has a motivation to become stronger. That's why “Fukkatsuru no Machi” came into existence.

Then, why it is sad?

“Wanting to become stronger” It is because of this dream. If you have an opponent you could fight, it will be very beneficial if you train yourself before the upcoming match. But if you win, what will happen? Will you discard your goal after that? There's always self contradiction in “wanting” and “having it”. If you want to escape from the contradiction, there's no other way but to keep your dream alive. In the climax of “Garouden I” Bunshichi almost cried when Kajiwara told him “I was scared of you.” At that very moment, he lost both, opponent and goal.

Of course, this story is not over yet, because this series will be a trilogy and, who knows, maybe more (after all, is it May 1998 as we speak) There will be more characters jumbled together coming at him, and if Bunshichi was alive in the real world, then it will be assumed that his next opponent would have to be Shozan Matsuo. I wonder if the final clash between these two characters will be the final curtain of “Garouden.” For some final words, the story that Yumemakura

Baku writes is about the dreams of men, while relentlessly pursuing these dreams they will also face darkness, transience of dreams, fragility, and sorrow.

[***EXTRA TEXT ADDED FOR THE 2006 OMNIBUS EDITION SPOILERS AHEAD OF VOLUME 3***]

Wow, it went longer than three volumes, who would have known!!? I don't have much space left but I wanted to comment about my favorite scene of volume III. There was a dead serious fight between Kajiwara and Nagata. In the middle of the battle, Kawabe gets in the middle and stops them, but not without injury!! Nagata keep screaming "I will quit this organization!!" while punching, kicking and beating Kawabe. It was really touching to see Kawabe silently taking all that beating without moving a muscle, only tears were rolling down his cheeks. There are many male characters in "Garouden" that often impress the readers, but

personally, my chest hurts every time I visualize Kawabe with tears rolling from his eyes. He's a man that has no other option but to stay in the organization.

I also wanted to comment on the characters problems but my space is running out. I guess I will have another occasion to write about this series and its characters. I will take it as my homework until then...

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**GAROUDEN COMMENTARY by
Ichido Reichan (LEADER OF THE WILD FANG
PROJECT, ENGLISH EDITOR)**

***“You are crazy, you know that? You know how
much it will cost you?”***

I am, yes, I am sorry... No I'm not, I enjoy this craziness. This line above you. Do you know how much people love to repeat it to me, over and over? And we get it done, Movies, manga books, interviews and now our first novel is done.

Wait...What? I finished a novel?? but I am so lazy!! I read comics, play games and watch movies all day. Besides my day job, do you know how many hobbies I have? Well, I was scared...not everyday you decide to become Tolkien or J.J R. Martin. Worse yet, "In Japanese" but let's start from the beginning. Why a novel? Why this novel? Why now?

Back in 2001, about 15 years ago, I became obsessed with a particular TV anime fighting series "Grappler Baki" It came as quick as it came in Japan thanks to Hong Kong editions, The translations were horrible but it was very watchable. Two anime seasons came and went and

the main character lost his mom, killed by his dad and I shared that fictitious sadness which was very real to me. His situation was somewhat alike to mine so I became invested in it.

....until it stopped....forever....

Damn!! what to do?? how will this thing continue? No more animation...I guess...I'll have to buy the manga.

By 2003 and \$300.00 spent later on a big box from Japan, I got it all!! I was going to find out how the anime continued the story of the boy fighting alone against big guys but I couldn't understand a thing!! I don't have many Japanese friends and the ones that I have do not want to be annoyed by comics they read once and forget about them.

So advancing a few months, I just figured out the pretty pictures and by the end of the last collection (42 volumes the first and 26 volumes the 2nd) I discovered that...it would continue, but nobody knew for how long.

“Why do you collect books you can't read?” good

question but I wanted to read them, so I used the last resort available for me, I'm good at making deals!! So first I tried to deal with these guys that knew how to erase bubbles in Japanese and add English on them and read the comics digitally. No avail, I was ignored and taken for a fool. Then I learned myself to do it, No avail, it came ugly as crap. Then I gave some books to a dude to translate 3 volumes, No Avail, dude did one and half. Then I paid a guy in Russia to translate, No avail, dude translated 2 out of the 4 volumes that I paid in advance (why would you do that!!? cause it was cheap and I TRUSTED!!) so eventually I finished 4 and quit the thing.

[240]

At the time I had only four friends (the group) and one of them was kind enough to finish volume 5 from the french edition and that's when the popularity of our group exploded "The Wild Fang

Project" created solely for the purpose of finishing all things "Grappler Baki" I told myself " I'll finish this thing and I'll quit.

But to no avail, once the french edition stopped at volume 9, all sort of help stopped and to continue, not only I needed to keep people working in Japanese translations for me...I had to pay them, and pay them "good".

So, I made the group private, set schedules, deadlines, donations, guarantees of speed and quality in exchange of monetary support and VIP status for my members and even though I became hated for it, we advanced to volume 27 of the target series of "Baki" in 8 months!!! (I decided to skip the first cause you can watch the anime for it) and then...It stopped, we caught up to it.

So, having money and plenty of time left waiting for a new volume every two months, I needed a "filler" series so I researched more about fighting manga from the author of Baki and fortunately I found a rough and cool series about this guy that

started street fights for nothing, you guessed it "GAROUDEN" The japanese comic book series.

Working on Garouden was a pleasant time in my life, I remember spending some good cash and visualizing the fights and I fell in love with the battle of Volume 14 and 15, those two men, best friends, admiring each other and fighting crudely to destroy each other but not because of hate, because of the passion of fighting.

I hardly remember when the manga started coming out and many fans of the series started popping out from the internet. It is a personal satisfaction of mine having introduced GAROUDEN to the world and I cried with it. I cried with the battle of Crybaby Sakura and Great Tatsumi (this doesnt exist in the novel, so spoilers are pointless) also my group of sponsors became passionate about Jyumei Kuga, a dark karate master that doesn't screw around.

So as beautiful and cool as the manga was, the

manga author got into an argument with the original publisher that owned the rights of the manga series, they let him have his 25 volumes but beyond that, They still own the continuation of the series and the manga author has put the story on hold since 2010. After two amazing Videogames for playstation two, one great movie that inspired the comic book series and the constant doubt that it will return. I had enough. There is a reason why we love this story so much, either manga, game or live action movie (we worked and played all three)

It is time to advance to the next level in this passion...

Damn!! what to do?? how will this thing continue? No more Manga...I guess...I'll have to buy the novel and advance to the next level.....

Translating the source of GAROUDEN....

And after a year and a month of working with a translator, raising funds to complete it, here we are, nice to meet you and I hope you enjoyed our first novel of “Garouden” I realized that a lot of the inspiration for “Baki” came from this novel series. Fast forwarding into 2016, Yumemakura Baku has sold dozens of millions of books in his Native Japan.

His works have inspired movies, series and manga series, some of them originals, some based on current works.

His latest achievement is a big budget production of “Everest: in the summit of the gods” to be released in 2016.

His released books are more than 350 and he keep writing his hit series “Chimera” and “Leader of the Demon hunters” but we, as a fighting fans we are, we will concentrate in releasing his series “Garouden” and “Shishi no Mon”

“You are crazy, you know that? You know how much it will cost you?”

Yes, a lot!! I am, yes, I am sorry... No I'm not, I enjoy this craziness. This line above you. Do you know how much people love to repeat it to me, over and over? And we get it done, Movies, manga books, interviews and now our second novel will start production soon and I invite you to read it, after you read it. If you still feel like it can't be done then don't worry about it. Life will keep going as always but if you help us in this project and you enjoy reading Baku's favorite pure fighting novel series. Help us, we need your enthusiasm and economic help to finish this whole novel series. There are 13 novels plus a special chapter (fist of the blue wolf) for the first series. The manga ends in volume 7 of the novels, the second series are called “Shin Garouden Hiden Kiku Shiki Hen” (New Garouden: the saga of the secret

fighting styles parts one and two, two novels of 350 pages each) and the third and probably final series "Shin Garouden Kenshin Kotei Hen" (New Garouden: The saga of gods against emperors parts one and two) also two 350 page novels plus 8 "shishi no mon" which is done because we love Jyumei Kuga and he's the main bad guy there.

So, how can you help? We will let you know, in the meantime look around for The Wild Fang Project, we're closer than you think. We will see you again in our next book Release. In the meantime, here's a sample of "Shishi no mon"
Until then.

Ichido reichan: Main editor and leader of the Wild Fang Project

January 16 2016

End of Volume 1

For your enjoyment, here's an extra bonus for you, SHISHI NO MON chapter 1, the full volume will be available in mid 2016.



獅子の門

獅子の門

群狼編

群狼編

夢枕 獅

夢枕
獅

K A P P A N O V E L S



光文社

THE GATE OF FIERCE LIONS

Super violent fighting novel series

Volume one: The wolfpack Arc
(Gunrou-Hen)

- Translations by Miyuki
- Production, design and rewritten

edition by Ichido Reichan

- Corrections by Mindblighter
- Project financed by The Wild Fang Project
- originally written as *SHISHI NO MO*
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[001]

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- EPILOGUE.
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- Words from Wild fang project editor
Ichido Reichan

[006]

Intro:

It would be easy to make a novel of "good guys against bad guys" but you'll know how it ends. How do we separate the "good" from the "bad guys"? are the bad always bad? what if the bad guys are amazing martial artists and we can't help but admire their core and arts?

Well my dear reader, this novel doesn't have any of that, there isn't a clear "hero" or "nemesis" as you might have figured out. We have five main

characters and we have no idea how their paths will cross. Five unusually strong and talented guys by the name of Kikuchiyo Akuta, Kan Takechi, Reiji Shimura, Bunpei Kakura and Takeshi Muroto.

You can pick your favorite from the group and chee

They will meet him, they will compete, they will fight against each other, they will improve their skill and eventually the five stories will become one. Come and enjoy the stories of men that are looking forward to discover themselves in the heat of battle, to challenge the strongest fighters around. Let the lions get loose in a paradise of fierce fighting.

Yumemakura Baku.

Prologue

The wind was blowing everywhere, sweeping the prairie relentlessly,
making that wet atmosphere seemed like the wind turned somehow into a green color.

The majestic sky with a gray blanket of solid gray let a few thunderclouds slide and slowly, a shade of light opened its way, bigger and bigger, as if the mighty force of light erased the gray across the sky. The blue sky opened a greater space as if a strong force behind it was pulling the strings, pushing the clouds away to fade into the horizon.

Like a fierce hammer striking down from the sky upon the land, the sun's rays landed on the prairie, but this didn't stop the rain from pouring on the

land, one strike of sunlight, one stride of rain, the wind is still green and still wet on the ground. A waist-high sea of daisies and green lilies waving furiously; it appeared as you could sink in them. The wind drove all this green vegetation left and right, in all directions, you couldn't miss it, the wind was visible wherever you looked.

[008]

It was here that Hikoroku Hashiba was facing one of the most intimidating men he had ever met. This man across Hikoroku had sharp crescent eyes, and by the look of his face, one could estimate that he was in his forties, most likely forty-three or forty-four-years-old.

What was a little startling about him was the color of his skin: it was almost like a dark solid iron color and, combined with his iron-sharp glance as if a million needles were launched to Hikoroku just by staring at him, There was no doubt that this

encounter was going to end violently.

Everything the man was wearing was black: his shoes, his long pants and a shirt with long sleeves, both men were soaking wet and Hikoroku, wearing just a pair of comfy jeans and a cotton shirt, felt as if he wasn't really wearing anything on his chest. The shirt was stuck on his skin and was showing the form of his abs and the color of his skin; water was sliding down from each end of both men's long strings of hair.

"I heard master Rosen had passed away" Hikoroku spoke with a soft tone.

"It was because of you!! It's your fault!!" The man replied with a strident voice.

"My fault? How can it be?"

"You challenged him and soon after that he died from his wounds"

"That's very unfortunate, I never intended for that to happen."

"Tell your excuses to someone who cares."

[009]

Swiftly, the man took a stance and slowly started moving towards Hikoroku, effectively closing the distance between them.

"Wait!!" Hikoroku yelled at the man.

"I won't..." the man replied...

"I've waited for this moment for the last three years, this will be settled today..."

He was ready to spring at him. Lowering his waist, the opening attack would be swift and

unpredictable.

A moment of silence, both men standing still while a thick beam of sunlight illuminated both of them, their space and then it kept moving towards the wet and green prairie.

Soon enough, the rain eased up a bit, still frozen in the moment, both men were staring at each other until a move broke the silence, it was a sound, a scary sound, but not a loud or a startling sound.

It was a breath....

"OOOUUUMMMPHH"

The man took a deep breath and when the glance in his eyes turned deadly, he dashed across towards Hikoroku.

"Sheeeahhh..."

CHAPTER 1: THE CHIKUSHO FIST

~ACT 1

He was just a kid walking down an asphalt road if. The sleeves of his big T-shirt were very loose because of the skinny arms of this kid. If by a joke we were to fit two or three more kids inside this shirt, they would have fit without a problem.

The legs that were visible from the pants also lack

The mud on his knees was almost dry, his pants were pretty wet around his waist and a big, black stain was visible. He must have been playing or exploring around water somewhere probably. In his left hand he was carrying a blue plastic bucket and in his right hand he was carrying a half-

torn net that had a bamboo handle, a few plastic bags and some other small items.

This was the high season of crayfish in the river clc

Elementary kids that tried hard to catch them could catch about fifty of them in half a day, only using a small net and some enthusiasm. It would seem that this kid was coming back from that particular crayfish hunting. The dark orange color of the sunset was reflected on his back. In a different time of the year it would be dark and the moon would be out but as of late, it was the sun that was still shining warm.

[011]

It was pleasant that the rainy season was over a few days ago. The sun heating the asphalt was making the air grow dense and one could feel the hot heavy air rising from the ground. The kid was dressed looking like an elementary school student

but in reality he was a junior in high school. His fellow classmates wouldn't be interested in walking with him to catch crayfish with nets and buckets. They would much prefer going to the arcade with plenty of pocket change or going to comic books stores to catch up on their favorite releases and check out the new stuff or simply stay at home playing with their computers and video games after browsing the specialty stores during the day.

The kids his age have many hobbies and interests other than hunting for crayfish because they think that that particular activity is "weird" or "something little kids do".

He was walking for an hour or so and the fields were being left behind. Now he was entering the residential area, night was about to start but it wasn't quite dark just yet. The red of the sky was mixed with dark blue in the horizon which gave a nostalgic look: a warm and sweet air with a soft ocean scent wafting over the town.

He turned right on a corner of the road where a large house with a tall fence was erected first in a row of average looking houses, fitting the standard of a small town neighborhood.

But the road didn't have only houses, there was a mom and pop's convenience stores with the vegetables and some produce in carts on the street, a few coffee shops here and there, a pub, bars and some stores.

The boy tried hard not to pay attention to the stores or the people around it, he kept walking straight with his chin down, a few blocks up, a park appeared on his right, it had a seesaw, a sand box, a big slide and a jungle gym. It even had a restroom and some food vendors, you could even organize an improvised match of badminton or baseball in the field and there were still a group of loud kids playing at the park when the street lights started lighting up.

[012]

There was this woman wearing a long apron and sandals trying to call the attention of a child that was playing in that park. It seemed as if she was trying to tell the child that playtime was over and that dinner was ready. When our kid arrived there, he stopped and stood there for a short while.

A white dog suddenly popped his head out from the azalea trees that were planted around the park and suddenly he started staring at the boy with a menacing look.

Opening his lips, he started growling and showing his teeth to the kid as if trying to find out why the boy was trespassing in his territory and what were the contents of that bucket that was making a particular screeching noise inside of it.

It was obvious that the kid started getting scared of

the dogs behavior, so without thinking it twice, he swung the net towards the dog and once the dog retreated, he ran to the other side of the street, But running across made the dog chase him with more intensity and eventually caught the kid easily. Without many options left, the kid swung the net again, hitting the face of the dog that caught the net and when the kid tried to pull it out, the fangs caught the net strongly and it wouldn't let go. The net was trapped in the fangs of the dog.

The dog was getting more violent and started shaking his head more vehemently. Thick-necked, the dogs power was immense and the skinny kid was swaying because of it. The fangs started to change the metal net's shape from a round form to a more oblong one, it was ruined.

Because the dog was growling, chewing the metal net continuously and the movement was becoming more intense, the shaft of the net bumped the dog square in the chin and that made the situation worse as the dog became even more furious. His

hair stood on its end and white bubbly saliva started pouring and falling from the beast jaw.

[013]

"Hey!! Knock it off!!!"

The same woman that came looking for the child screamed the dogs name loudly Maybe she was the owner of the dog, or perhaps her neighbor, but in either case, calling the dogs name in a high voice has an adverse reaction to the situation and dogs get confused thinking that the owner is cheering for them to neutralize the threat rather than leave it be.

Shaking his head crazily without growling or biting, the net finally got disentangled from his fangs.

Finally free, the dog gave chase to the boy that started running desperately. Jumping at him, he tumbled him on the ground and gave a solid bite to the boy's butt.

The boy's short pants got half slipped and blood started pouring from his right leg, you could see a pale and small pair of hips showing up and the bite wound was uncovered, bleeding profusely.

The bucket fell out of the kid's hands and after the dog bit him, he started barking at him for a while and then jumped at the plastic bag to chew whatever was inside of it. The boy promptly stood up and pulled away the bag from the dog and realized it ripped apart.

The curious thing about this encounter with the boy and the dog was that the boy never cried or screamed at the horrible wound and pain caused by the dog. He just stood up, took a hard breath, a slight groan and tried to recover the bag and the bucket from the floor but because his pants were mid waist he lost his balance and fell backwards, that's when the dog decided to jump and attack him again.

Stumbling violently, he hit his head on the concrete and tried desperately to kick the dog away but the dog caught one of his feet and started biting his feet under his shoes.

[014]

In a desperate struggle, he sat down as best as he could and smacked the dog in an eye with a closed fist. The dog shook his head and started scratching his skin with his four limbs. All across the kid's legs red lines started showing up and the scratches were so many that it felt that they were made with a sharp fork.

The kid grabbed the dog by the neck hair and they both crumpled on the concrete floor. The woman now started sounding quite desperate in his screams for the dogs name but a kind neighbor got out of a house to help the kid. This man was running with mountain shoes and threw a kick that caught the dog right in the stomach. With a yelp, the dog jumped and retreated due to the pain.

"Stupid ass mutt!! Get the hell outta here!!"

Chasing the limping dog away, he looked at the kid.

"Hey boy, are you alright!?"

He crouched and got close to the kid without touching him, disinterestedly, the boy sat down for a few minutes and stayed still. The t-shirt was completely ripped and various scratches, bumps and drops of blood were all over the kid. The wounds on his legs looked especially serious but he stayed silent.

It was hard to watch how miserable the bloody wound on his bare hips looked like but even when the man was trying to help him, once he looked the man directly in the eyes, the kid stared down and did nothing but breath heavily and kept silent.

"Where do you live?" the woman asked a useless

question just to show a vague interest in helping but he didn't answer to it. The man offered a hand to him so he could stand up but the kid ignored it. Instead, he started pulling up his pants while still sitting in the asphalt, at this point, it felt like the kid wanted to be rude on purpose, he stood up still looking at the ground while sweating buckets from his forehead. He was standing still while a mysterious cracking noise started coming out from somewhere.

[015]

"What is that?" in many a movie about monsters and serpents we would hear that cracking noise that would belong to a rattlesnake, but this one was different, it was weird and with a high pitch. Because it was getting darker, the sound was creepier but the bucket was still sitting on the ground.

A bunch of bright red creatures like small lobsters started crawling out of the bucket but these weren't

twenty or forty of them, there weren't even sixty, there was more than a hundred of them.

At first, the woman and the man had no idea what those were and the woman gave a soft scream.

"Ah! Right, you were catching crayfish, the season is coming in full swing, I see"

They weren't just "crayfish" They were American crayfish, the hardest to catch, not that they would figure that out with a simple glance. The forceps of those crayfish were removed masterfully but nonetheless, it was like a creepy spectacle. The man's face was in shock once he looked at the side of the ripped plastic bag. The contents of the bag were visible and quite startling, it was the ripped forceps of the crayfish, many of them were still moving and clapping as if they had life of their own.

"Hey, what's...."

The man asked but looking at the fierce eyes of the silent boy, still looking down, he said with a resilient voice.

"Kikuchiyo Akuta..."

That was his name, he was only fourteen.

[016]

~ACT 2

He was a weird kid, not only in terms of his personality but his looks were really strange. His face didn't even look like that of a kid at all or even human for that matter. If we might be so bold to say it, he was sort of "reptilian looking". Without trying to make fun of him, we can assure

you that looking at him you'd feel the presence of somebody that really look like a lizard with long crescent eyes.

His eyes gave a weird look because they were tilted a bit as well. His face never shows any sign of expression at any time and even though his face looked reptilian, his personality was more mouse-like. A very wet and frightened mouse that was too skinny to face the real world.

Comparing him to other kids his age, he was way too short and scrawny for his size.

Every time he had to talk to someone, he'd always look down to the ground, and, if someone tried to make eye contact with him, his lack of expression would turn into fear right away.

He would talk, give a quick look and look down right away, he'd do this with everyone, even with the adults of his family, more so with the only parent he had, his mother, especially with his mother.

Yes, he lived only with his mother in this coastal town that was located about an hour from Tokyo by train. Living in a humble rented house in a quiet location, he usually never bothered to know who his father was, why he left or if he was alive at all. He never asked and his mother never bothered telling anyway, it was as if this man never existed in their lives. They never talked about him nor were they interested in such a useless topic for conversation.

He remembered once asking where his father was, only to be met with furious eyes and punches from his irate mother who was inclined to sink herself in the stupors that alcohol offered rather than deal with her son's feelings.

She was drunk all the time and would turn violent on him quite often, hitting him and kicking him for reasons that made no sense. She got used to hit him with closed fists across his face and cheeks. He

wouldn't avoid them, or cry, or beg her to stop, he'd let her punch him over and over until her hand was bleeding and swollen and she passed out until the next day.

[017]

His mother's name was Reiko Akuta. Even though she looked way older due to the constant alcohol abuse, she was actually thirty four years old. She gave birth to Kikuchiyo when she was around twenty years old and she used to be employed somewhere around the neighboring town.

Nowadays, close to sunset, she would apply flashy makeup on her face and light a cigarette and take off to work.

Sometimes she would return at midnight, sometimes she'd return early in the morning. No matter how early or late she'd return, she always stayed up and served breakfast or dinner to Kikuchiyo. They were together before the boy went to school. This would happen without fail every

morning.

Reiko has the distinction of being younger and more beautiful than any of the mothers of his classmates. Often he thought that she'd look even more beautiful without all that cheap makeup.

"Why would she smudge that beautiful face of hers?"

The boy could never understand that particular habit of women.

Even though Reiko had never mentioned to him what kind of "employment" she had, he wasn't stupid enough to ask, because he already knew it. He had seen it on television, when women needed quick sums of money, they resort to one thing. He figured that his mother got paid to drink, dance and party with men, entertain them, sometimes in ways that their own wives wouldn't. He knew that these men would turn very generous once she'd welcome their advances, their hands on her breasts

and her hips.

"Men can't be trusted, they aren't reliable."

His mom used to say every morning after returning from work reeking of alcohol and complaining about whatever happened that day to her. She got even more talkative when Kikuchiyo pretended with all his might to appear sound asleep, even though nobody could sleep with the noise she'd make when she arrived.

"Don't you dare look down on me, stupid, this is just a job!!"

"Who cares about men with money!! I wouldn't love them for all the money in the world, they are trash!! They are heartless men!!!"

"Damn him!! Oh shit!!"

"That asshole!! Getting carried away because I let him do it once!!"

"Pfft!! we'll see next time who has the last laugh"

She kept mumbling these words aloud. She did this while cleaning her face and changing her working clothes. Then she would pour a cup of hot tea and make some more noise.

That noise would always startle him and it was impossible to sleep after she returned home. Trying his best he pretended to be asleep. When the house was finally engulfed in silence, she would start sobbing quietly at first and then she would cry profusely for a long time.

One time he tried to hug her and console her when s

"I'm crying, you son of a bitch!! because you're

here alive, I wish you'd never been born!!"

Her screams got more intense and gradually more hurtful.

"I can't wait for the day that you'll go away, you should leave right now!!"

After saying that she hugged him harder and cried loudly.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean it"

She would apologize while still crying and sobbing, her breath would entangle her words.

"If someday you decide to go away, I will follow you anywhere"

She repeated the same words while hugging him harder.

"Going away? Where?" he had no idea where he should go.

It was confusing his mind to no end. Every kind word and hurtful word was told seriously, as if she believed in all of them from the bottom of her heart. Did she hate him? Love him?

Kicking him from home and following him afterwards? The concept of "going away" was vague for him.

Kikuchiyo figured that when he'd be old enough, he'd move away to a "man's place" one like that guy owned when he went to look for his mom at that place. One where he would live while going to work and returning home. More often than not, he'd feel intimidated by her actions but he didn't hate her. He hated when she hit him and got drunk and irrational but he understood that he was simply a "punching bag" for her problems and frustrations. She took it out all on him, fighting and hurting that invisible force that made her miserable and snatched away her happiness, something that wasn't Kikuchiyo at all.

[019]

He was punished because he was a poor substitute for the real problem.

But it hurts for real when someone punches you with bad intentions, no matter how weak or how loving this person was with you, the pain you have to bear will be sharp and unforgiving.

It felt worse to see his mother crying and frustrated, so he bore the pain and the punches quietly.

That's why it was so hard to return home while knowing his mother was there; bleeding and looking like that after the mad dog incident.

He had scars everywhere, a soft cascade of blood was pouring from his leg, right where the dog bit him and his t-shirt was completely torn. The blood had already clotted over the cut in his left leg.

Kikuchiyo knew how furious his mother was going to be after she'd see him like that.

He couldn't help but walk and stand still in front of

the door, for almost half hour. He figured his mom was out working for the rest of the day so he could arrive, take a shower and clean himself up. Unfortunately, that wasn't going to be. She was drunk and home early. Sensing the boy at the door, she opened it and she got quite the surprise.

"Damn!" he thought "Why is she at home at this hour!!?" the only day that he needed to be alone to avoid a conflict was the very day her mom got sour business and decided to call it a day at an early hour. Luck wasn't with him, sometimes she wouldn't return until the next morning but sometimes she'd stay at home drunk for two days straight.

The alcohol breath was the one that hit him first.... "Answer, who did this to you?" the tone of her voice was severe.

He didn't answer, he looked at the ground and said...

"What about your job?"

"swaaatam" a violent slap across his face was the second thing that hit him...

He felt like hot fire was applied to his cheeks.

"Who did this to you?" she repeated the question, her voice was unforgiving.

[020]

Kikuchiyo kept looking at the floor silently when, violently, the second slap took him off balance.

"Splat!!" "Answer, who did this to you!!?"

his cheeks stopped hurting but they were burning almost from the inside out.

"BAAM" "Answer!!" SPLAT!! SPLAT!! "Who did this to you!!?"

It was a pitiful and heartbreaking image, the mother and son were making a really somber scene.

The son, bleeding and injured was standing there receiving silently slap after slap while the mom, rather than attending his wounds at once, decided to interrogate him with corporal punishment to find out what happened at once.

But Kikuchiyo wasn't answering, and he got slapped violently again,
and again...
and once again....
and once more....

But looking at how his mother's hand was getting swollen and fearing she would sustain an injury, he decided to break his silence and told her the story of what happened in the park, the fish net and the mad dog.

"Whose was the fucker or the bitch that owns that dog!!" she demanded with eyes filled with rage and launched another slap to keep Kikuchiyo talking.

"I have no idea, mom"

"Why not, you little shit!!"

"I just don't know, Mom."

"You retarded asshole!!"

She took some time to launch a fierce slap with a heavy hand.

After that, puffing and with a real sore hand, she grabbed him and sat him on the dinner table.

She picked up the first aid kit, a towel and some water in a bowl and placed them in front of him.

"You might be an idiot, but I'm sure you know how to take care of yourself, right?"

That alcohol breath gave him the worse slap of the evening, even the hand slaps weren't that unpleasant.

But her face wasn't pale because she was drunk. Actually, she looked very beautiful with that wild look and her eyes were bright and moist. They were giving a strong light, full of kindness and love.

For a moment, Kikuchiyo heard his mother's footsteps coming out in the backyard and heard her perusing something in the back of the house. She returned almost half an hour later with a strange package that she tossed on the tatami mat where he was standing.

"BAAM" the tatami made a heavy noise.

[021]

"Open it!!" she demanded.

He quietly got on his knees and started unwrapping the strange gray package.

The first thing he saw was the eerie light of a metal blade.

It was a small iron ax, sharp and heavy enough to be handled comfortably.

He slowly glanced at her face as if asking..."What do I do with..?"

"You are going to slaughter that mad dog tonight!!"

She said this with furious ogre eyes.

"Do not let dogs and men make a fool out of you.

We are all alone, we all have to struggle in this life by ourselves and nobody will help you when you're alone!!"

She was getting over excited while saying these words.

"Tonight, you are going to kill that mad beast and b

She finished her demands with an intimidating warning that was more scary than anything she had done before.

"Do not return without the white dog's corpse or you will not be allowed to live here until you do."

[022]

~ACT 3

The kid, Kikuchiyo left that night around nine o'clock, but didn't return until the following night around midnight. It was an absurd amount of time but he was back the same way he returned home the previous night, standing there until his mom could sense that he was there. When she noticed that he was there he was silent, looking down. How long has he been there?

"Kikuchiyo..."

Tumbling around, she stood up to open the door,

nothing really had changed from the previous night. The towel, the water bowl and the medicine box were exactly in the place he had left them, even the paper that was used to wrap the ax was in the same spot.

There were two empty bottles of whiskey on top of the table that was visible from the entrance.

That was the only thing that was different from the previous night, even her clothes were still the same.

[023]

She had been waiting for him, drinking whiskey without sleeping or going to work.

When he returned, he was carrying a big black plas

His t-shirt was even more ripped and bloody, after these two nights, it would become unusable.

"Did you kill it?" Reiko demanded an answer.

Without the smallest of facial expressions, Kikuchiyo slowly nodded.

"Show me, I want to see it!!" Walking hastily to the doors, she almost tripped on her sandals. The edge of the plastic bag was filled with some liquid and it was there, hanging out swollen. Giving a simple look, she told him,

"Don't open it yet!! Take it out to the garden."

Both of them went out to the garden. In reality the space was too tiny to be called a garden, but it was available for them so that's what they called it, The metal fence was as high as his shoulders and it surrounded the house completely. In the small space between the house and the fence two shadows were moving, illuminated sometimes by a small lamp post. There was enough cover for them to carry on their ghastly business.

Kikuchiyo placed the bag upside down and opened it. The sound of liquid pouring on the soft grass invaded the quiet night, as a river of dark water found it's way to the ground.

Spatters of dark water splattered onto his tiny legs, but this wasn't dark water...

It was blood.



An overwhelming stench of blood filled the air. After the blood poured from the bag, the bloody ax followed, falling into the deep pool of blood. It was still shining. Like something grotesque coming out from an empty shell, a heavy lump滑ed from the plastic bag, It was the lifeless head of that Mad white dog. Its tongue was hanging vertically to the ground and blood was dropping from the tip, it was a sinister sight and the stench was unbearable.

Kikuchiyo shook the bag some more and the full body of the dog fell into the pool of blood. The ax and head, making a heavy splash and a ghastly sound. Any normal human being would have thrown up by the sight and smell already. But this was the beast that attacked the boy mercilessly and unprovoked.

"This is the one, Mom, I waited in the park until it

came out with his owner"

"So this was the fucking dog that had the nerve to mess with us?"

The small lamp made Reiko's eyes shine with the tears that were about to flow.

The dog's head was open and something thick, red and gooey was coming out of it. Reiko squatted close to the body, grabbed the fur and moved it to retrieve the ax from underneath. Holding it with her right hand, she felt it was slippery, so she put the ax down and wiped the blood from her hand on the white fur that wasn't soiled with blood, feeling a better grip. She held the ax once again and stared at the head with contempt, looking at the sharp fangs that once hurt her son. She was the only one in the world that was allowed to hurt her son but her attacks were done with love. This beast or any other beast, human or otherwise that dared to hurt her or her own would share this fate.

"I won't be fooled!!"

She cocked the ax as high as she could, she was way too skinny to be holding the ax, but her wrath ignored the lack of power and making her shake all over, even the arm holding the ax, the beautiful face of Reiko Akuta turned into something evil and unearthly.

"Urrryyyaaahhhhh"

She struck down the ax while screaming loudly, the heavy edge struck the jaws of the dog, moving them out of place and making a "kchak" sound, cutting muscle and tendons.

The ax was lifted again...

She struck it down again...

[026]

"We are all alone!!" she screamed.

She struck it down again and this time, there was a bone-cracking sound: the edge has finally reached the bone. She kept striking it down incessantly until the jaws broke down from the head and something white flew and hit her cheeks. It was a piece of bone, but not just any bone, it was a big fang. The same fang that bit Kikuchiyo and made him bleed. She destroyed it completely.

With lips raised upwards, eyes opening wide and forming a diabolic smile full of spattered blood, That beautiful face was now nothing more than a vengeful demon.

She screamed for violence and jumped violently at the maimed face to finish it until there was nothing else to hack the ax into, Head pieces exploding all around a bloody pool, there was no reason, no common sense in it. Humanity had disappeared from the kind woman.

While in the hacking frenzy, she wondered how long she and her son would have to stand these ridiculous situations of abusive people and creatures that were owned by them, placing all the

resentment and the fury for men and society itself in each swing and hack of the ax.

It was a violent scene, as if a demon living inside Reiko had no other way to escape or express its feelings but possessing a poor crying woman and making her commit these atrocities.

Kikuchiyo loved this tearful woman, but didn't like it when she turned violent like this.

He silently stood still looking down at her. He would endure whatever pain, insult or tribulation she could inflict on him, still. He never clearly understood the "going away" thing.

[027]

~ ACT 4

It was a pleasant summer break but Kikuchiyo couldn't find a place interesting enough to hang out

this time of year. The coastal town was beautiful and there were tourists and visitors everywhere, tons of kids of all ages playing around and it would only take him a fifteen minute walk to reach the coolest spot to swim an the beach. So many fun things to do and enjoy, but there wasn't a single person either on the beach or downtown that was his friend. He knew most of the local kids and the places they'd hang out, but none wanted to go with him to the river or to the sea.

[028]

He had a hard time speaking to people. He rarely talked to his classmates unless he was required to and because of this, he had no friends.

In elementary school, one of the kids had made a stupid joke that his name sounded like a girls and it had stuck. Even today he was still being teased for that. Since he was most of the time alone at night, he watched as much television as he pleased.

There was nobody there to scold him or tell him what to watch. He didn't have to worry about the squabbles of Japanese families about what they wanted to watch, the television was his alone and he never missed any of his favorite shows.

He knew everything about all the anime series, concerts, idol shows and movies his classmates liked to talk about at school. When they would talk, he overheard conversations and knew that there was a lot that they missed and he had watched. Sometimes he was the only one that had watched. Knowing more than the rest was his pride but there never was an opportune moment to talk about it.

He always missed the chance due to his soft voice.

All he could mutter was the name of the show or his favorite Idol and everyone ignored him and moved on, After he talked about his favorite shows and singers, his turn to speak was over. He couldn't express very well why he liked some

artists in comparison to other idols or elaborate more about why this show would be better than that other show another kid liked, or spread gossips about what was coming up in the popular TV programs. He failed something as easy as that, communication always betrayed him.

His classmates cared little about him or his feelings.

He could feel that he froze the happy atmosphere of the group every time he opened his mouth to talk. That was something that annoyed him to no end, he wanted to laugh and talk and have friends. But lately it was something that crushed his optimism, so he felt happier thinking that it would be easier not to talk to them instead. This worked at school but during the summer break, it was hard for his soul to see the same classmates hanging out, playing, talking and openly ignoring him when summer was in full swing. Furthermore, it would be really unpleasant and rude for him to not say

anything to them when they were swimming in the sea or enjoying a day in the river. Even if he said "hi!" he'd have to keep talking, it would even appear that he was stalking them, even though, this was a tiny coastal town with a few places to have fun.

The only options available would be for him to sw

[029]

He knew his classmates thought he was weird and needed some serious help.

"It's so hard being around him" they would say openly, without making an effort to integrate him to the group. Some guys started spreading rumors that he was mentally challenged and just a plain idiot. There was nothing wrong about him but he felt everything was wrong at all times, especially coming across groups of girls, he would hear small giggles and hidden looks. He knew they were

talking about him, inventing stories, believing rumors and who knows what else.

To stop this destructive pattern, he would avoid the places they would be hanging out at in summer, hang out at places where nobody would know who he was or wondering what he was doing there. A place where no kids that knew him would go? The answer was stupidly simple.

"I'll hang out at school"

If he stayed at home, he'd have to hang out with his mother for half a day and tolerate her quirks and mood swings but there was a place that the kids would avoid like the plague. It worked just great because it was a beautiful location.

Isogahara Junior High school was located right around the coast, a great place to swim at with little to no people hanging out, he'd be swimming alone without nobody annoying him. After swimming, there was a forest of pine trees not that

far from there that he visited and would spend half a day lying down under the shade and breathing that sweet air.

That was his secret hideout to spend his last summer week in good spirits.

Something he loved doing in the forest was to catch all sorts of insects, there were so many. He got excited just thinking about it, he found oriental long headed locusts, tetrigidae, lady bugs, praying mantis, damselflies, long horned grasshoppers, and various unknown leaf insects. There were so many little insects under the trees that he spent hours catching them and the number of bugs never decreased no matter how many he squashed or chased, or played with.

He would always find so many in the same place he caught them as the previous day.

The insects were everywhere as if these maggots grew underneath the grass.

Everyday he'd spend two hours catching cool

looking bugs, but not to take them home as pets as kids usually do. No, he would look at them for a minute struggling and then, one by one, he'd start ripping out their legs, until there were no more legs, wings or antennae left.

[030]

He always saved crushing the head for last, no insect was to survive his hand grip.

He did this for the small and thin bugs, but his favorite ones to crush were the praying mantis and grasshoppers, he enjoyed pulling their heads off after all their legs were gone. They came our easily after all the white stuff was wiped out.

Strong and stinky grass fumes would stick to his nose and would also reek of dead insect blood but he made a discovery that woke a strange feeling within him.

After ripping the wings, legs, antennae, the praying mantis was the only one that was still alive. After its head was ripped open, looking like a mere

green stick, it would do a weird dance on his palm for a few seconds. He knew it was something cruel and perverse but he felt that he was watching an indecent show just meant for him, watching how a life that was robbed of legs, wings, head and simply looking like a green stick would still carry a hopeless fight for survival.

That made him feel awful, but also, he felt a strange excitement about it, his crotch was hot and stiff and lifted hard, he felt good about being excited.

He'll still remember that day....

Kikuchiyo arrived really late at the school yard that day. The guys from the sports clubs were gone for the day and it was almost sunset, but somehow he was still there.

He was waiting for someone, there was a girl that he was waiting to meet.

Her name was Naoko Izawa, a sophomore that was attending class B. They didn't arrange this meeting

previously, he just saw her entering the school building because she was a member of the library committee. The students at Isogahara junior high were allowed to check out books twice a week during their summer break. Every week, two members of the library committee would come at 1 pm and would stay a few hours until the other members arrived, they had about twenty members and they took turns to keep the library running smoothly.

[031]

That day was Noriko's turn to work in the library and he was waiting for her to end her shift and come out of the library to talk to her. He had nice conversations with her a few times and she took the time to listen without making him feel weird.

This girl was about 5' 6 ft. which it was pretty tall for a junior high school kid but her intelligence

gave her an aura that made her more beautiful than she already was. Her dark straight hair fell around her shoulders, her nose, very cute and shapely, made her delicate face match with her wide eyes. Her lips, without lipstick, were very soft and gave her a mature look.

There was a subtle innocence in her looks but her body was well developed for her age.

She was pretty smart but not the outgoing, overly talkative type. She wouldn't raise her hand to answer teacher's questions but she was capable of giving assertive answers when asked in class.

She was also a bit eccentric and didn't talk to Kikuchiyo's classmates, but for different reasons than him. A few kids tried to ask her out on dates and talk to her but she would always cut the conversation short and while hanging out with her circle of friends, she would feel detached of the conversation no matter how hard they tried to integrate her.

For her, Kikuchiyo wasn't "the weird creature" that everyone gossiped about, he was just another kid in school like all the others and it made him feel relieved that he can interact with her without prejudices.

He saw her during class and she would smile when they eyes meet, that made him feel a sweet warmth in his chest and his heartbeat started speeding up. Noriko was in the school now, he was planning of seeing her walking home and going to his own home afterwards. It was a few minutes before sunset when she came out from the building. Unfortunately, she wasn't alone. She was walking with Seto, another committee member.

[032]

Kikuchiyo felt that his body's temperature started rising out of control. For how many hours were they talking alone in the library? A river of black

fire started running within his veins. It was unmistakably the dark flame of jealousy but that didn't force an expression on his face either. The only thing he felt in his face was that his lips stiffened as if he was swallowing a heavy metallic stick.

He wasn't going to announce himself being there but he felt this guy at her side betrayed his own expectations.

Kikuchiyo kept his distance and waited until both of them went out the gate and turned the corner a block from the school. He started walking as if he was going somewhere close, but in reality he was following them.

He wasn't wearing his usual short pants today, he was wearing a pair of comfy jeans and a blue checked short-sleeved shirt. Curiously he was also carrying two carton boxes in his arms and dry noises were coming out from the carton boxes.

The street around the corner led to a path along the

beach and a little further, the pine trees followed. The street was full of pine trees but you still could see the sea between the sparse branches of the trees.

He was walking down the street looking at the gorgeous scenery of the sea on his left.

The scent of pine trees and salty sea breeze tickled his nose. He could see a few people fishing on the pier. Nobody was swimming at this hour but there was an old gentleman walking his dog and some couples sitting down or walking and holding hands while looking at the sea.

The reflection of the afterglow from the sunset was painting the waves, changing them with different colors. One could believe that the waves were reflecting every color around them, the green of the pine trees, the blue, dark blue and orange of the sky, the white of the sand, the color of the houses, the t-shirt of the little kid running along the beach, the ships at sea, a very nostalgic palette of summer.

All these colors dissolved inside the waves and combined with the tide to be ultimately washed out to the open sea. Many students frequented this particular street when school was in session, so it would not arise any suspicions if the couple were to spot him, so he kept walking naturally.

Suddenly, a tall man passed Kikuchiyo from behind. He was wearing a sweatshirt, he was jogging but his pace was fast and frenetic. He quickly passed Noriko and Seto that were walking about 65 feet from Kikuchiyo. The man captured his attention because he was running barefoot and you could see his feet darkened by the mud. What kind of man would run like that?

Someone yelled at him while he was looking at the running man.

"Hey---!!

It was a raspy voice. Maybe it wasn't for him, but he turned around anyway.

He knew that guy: he was Takashi Shimamura, his fellow classmate. He was standing along three other guys. He noticed two more classmates of his, Kenji Shimizu and Ryoichi Kato, that were enrolled in class C. He had no idea who the other guy was, but he was burly and taller than his classmates. Maybe that guy was in high school.

"Hey Kiku...!!" Shimamura was calling him and getting closer.

He was wearing white pants and a green t-shirt that was wide open in the front. He had dyed his hair bright blond while it was black before the summer began. He also grew a very thin beard under his nose.

"What the fuck are you doing here!!?"

Shimamura lifted his shoulders a bit, he was menacing as usual.

Kikuchiyo didn't answer.

[034]

Looking down, Kikuchiyo kept his silence.

"You fucker!! You were following Noriko too, right?"

Shimamura smirked and let his gum show.

Without changing his stance, Kikuchiyo didn't mutter a sound.

The accusation was baseless since this was the direction that Kikuchiyo took everyday to return home. It would have taken him ten minutes walking and turning two more blocks to get home.

He had taken a different street, even though he could

"Huh!! Say something?" he gave a small push to Kikuchiyo. The silence was annoying him.

Shimamura was famous in Isogahara junior high school for being a notorious troublemaker and he seldom went to class. He had never been arrested but he had attacked and punched teachers many times.

One time he ambushed a teacher outside school with his two friends because he was scolded for smoking in class. The three of them punched him hard but they never got in trouble for it.

His friends obviously were Shimizu and Kato, everyone knew it was them but nobody said a thing.

These three were the kind of people that would have an explosive and overbearing attitude if someone scolded them or said something that they didn't like.

They would be ruthless and wouldn't hesitate in punching anybody. Nobody could stop them once they started attacking and they would aim at your nose to let you bleed on purpose so everyone could

see that they did that to you. Kikuchiyo had been punched by Shimamura before without reason. This time, he had demanded an answer and since he didn't get it, Shimamura got furious and punched Kikuchiyo, sending him to the ground.

[035]

There are people in this life that get picked on by abusive people by nature.

Unfortunately, Kikuchiyo was one of them. He had a natural ability to draw violent tendencies from naturally oppressive and arrogant individuals just by being near them. This held true for people like Shimamura. The more Kikuchiyo got frightened by Shimamura, the more angry Shimamura would get as if a dark beast within him got poked by a stick after biding its time to come out and explode on him. However, Shimamura didn't pick on him as often as before. But it wasn't because Shimamura got bored or became a kinder person, but because he didn't come to school as often.

"So, why is he today on this street asking me these questions?"

"I saw you Kiku!! You were waiting for Noriko outside the school. You were on the move as soon as she started walking away"

"....."

"Answer me, asshole!!"

He biffed Kikuchiyo on the shoulder, his voice was becoming more furious.

"They saw me..." Kikuchiyo thought to himself but :

"They were watching me....they watched my every move..."

He started obsessing with these thoughts.

"These four guys were observing me for a while,

they saw everything I did."

"You knew Noriko's day in the library was today, didn't you?"

Kato mentioned this standing behind Shimamura. Just like Shimamura, Kato was wearing a pair of baggy white pants and a dark t-shirt.

He didn't dye his hair like Shimamura but he was bulkier and more intimidating than him.

What Kato said sent a chill into Kikuchiyo's spine.

"Does this means that they were waiting for Noriko too!!"

[036]

It didn't take long for him to figure out the sinister plan that these four were going to carry out.

"What a brash babe..."

Kikuchiyo remembered that Shimamura said something like this when Noriko ignored his approaches.

"I'm going to make her cry and scream from pleasure someday". He also remember that he said this too.

"That someday must be today!!"

There wasn't that many people on the street and the sun had just disappeared behind the mountain. It was getting dark fast. There was little light away from the pine trees but it was dark in the forest. The burly guy standing behind them, suddenly broke his silence with a deep voice.

"Get them..."

Shimamura ordered Shimizu and Kato to hurry and get them. They started running to catch Noriko and

Seto that were away almost 160 feet from them.

"Got you fooled but she does dirty things with that pretty face"

Shimamura gave a glance to Kikuchiyo as if he was laughing at his naivety.

"She's just a fucking slut, you know?"

He said this loudly with a cynical tone of voice, but Kikuchiyo didn't understand what he meant by it, but he felt horrified when he heard what he said next.

"She takes money from middle age men and she lets them stick it in, the whore..."

Shimamura was nodding as if he had the higher moral ground and then turned to talk to a very disappointed man.

"Is that right, Mr. Kuromuna?"

[037]

"Yeah, that's right..." the man named Kuromuna nodded. He looked like a sleazy yakuza even though he was going in high school.

"She looks down on us as if we were trash but what she does is dirtier than us"

Shimamura grabbed Kikuchiyo's shoulder, turned him around and pushed him hard, he was very strong.

"Walk!!" he ordered him with a strong tone.

This road was leading them to a densely forested area. If they kept walking where the forest met the sea, there would be a secluded area that people never walked around there.

"I'm gonna show you her pleasure screams"
Shimamura said, smiling.

He kept pushing Kikuchiyo's back until they started walking. Kato and Shimizu were walking towards them. Noriko was coming along between them but mysteriously Seto wasn't there.

"Where is Seto?" Shimamura asked them.

"As soon as I told him I needed to have a private word with Noriko, he remembered that he had an important appointment and left in a hurry." Kato started laughing at how easy it was to snatch her. Kikuchiyo knew that Noriko was looking at him surprised but he kept looking down. He didn't want to look at her.

"Shimamura Senpai, what do you want? It's quite late..."

He heard Noriko saying with a tense voice but she

"I need you to walk over there with me, Babe, just for a little while"

"If you have something to say, say it here, I won't go anywhere else" Her tone was serious.

As soon as she finished saying that, there was a sharp sound.

SPLAT!!

Shimamura slapped her violently. When she fell on her knees, Kato and Shimizu picked her up and carried her holding her arms and took her to the pine tree forest. At the same time, Shimamura was pushing Kikuchiyo into that dark forest too, following them.

[038]

The ground was a combination of dirt mixed with

sand and the terrain was so rugged that if you were to make a big hole there, you'd find even more sand there. It would be very hard to run away from there.

"Why is Kikuchiyo Akuta-kun here with you, guys?" She couldn't understand why a soft and polite boy would be hanging out with those delinquents, but he was the only one that could side with her and help her out.

"Hey, idiot!! She asked you a question, answer!!!" Shimamura screamed.

Kikuchiyo was biting his lip softly while holding f

"You haven't say a damn word since I found you, are you retarded!?"

A vicious punch caught him right in the cheek and in the nose. He felt the flash of the impact, the intense heat next and pain, in turn, followed. Pain...and the warm liquid from the back of the nose to the mouth came at the same time. Kikuchiyo

knew that metallic taste pretty well. It was blood, his own blood started flow in a stream between his nose and his tightly sealed lips, he didn't mutter a sound or a groan.

Shimamura finally paid attention at the boxes that Kikuchiyo were holding.

"Show me what do you have in the boxes!!"

He tried to take those boxes from his hands forcefully.

[039]

Kikuchiyo wasn't letting go.

"Let it go, fool!!"

He was punched in the stomach this time. His skinny body bent like a broken dogleg but he still was holding the boxes in his hands for dear life.

"This is bullshit, gimme that!!"

Kuromuna took Kikuchiyo's skinny right arm with his thick fingers and quickly started twisting it. He must have felt intense pain but he held the box with all his might for a while but the box eventually started breaking because he was holding it so hard. There was a small scratching noise from inside the box that was echoing inside the thick forest.

"Mr. Kuromuna is pretty pissed off because someone killed his dog recently, so, for your own good, Kiku, let it go" When Shimamura said that, Kikuchiyo finally let his right hand go.

When Kuromuna grabbed and opened the box to see what the kid was defending so vehemently, He could see the contents with the natural light of r There were so many little things wiggling around the carton box: praying mantis, grasshoppers, dragon flies, and lady bugs that had no head or legs. Hundreds of them rubbed against each other or against the paper to make more noise.

"What the fuck is this!?" Kuromuna tossed the box

After it landed, he went and kicked it and stepped on it over and over again.

Shimamura opened the second carton box and found the legs, heads, wings and antennae of the bugs from the other box. Disgusted, he tossed the box onto the ground.

"Are you crazy!!?"

Kikuchiyo didn't make a sound or an expression, he kept looking at the ground.

[040]

It seemed that something eerie slowly came out from Kikuchiyo's body. It was inexplicable but something very alike to miasma was engulfing them.

Noriko, that was seized by Kato and Shimizu at the moment none of them couldn't see the contents of the boxes.

"Hey! What was it!? What was inside the boxes?" both of them were asking.

"Dead bugs. He ripped their legs off and put them i

"You creepy fucker!!" He punched Kikuchiyo repeatedly until he fell on the floor.

Right at that moment, there were sounds of running steps in the forest coming close from where they were.

"Help me!! Please Help!!" Noriko screamed at the top of her lungs.

The sound of steps running stopped and instead, the sound of someone approaching them started to feel closer. The voice of a man could be heard from a short distance.

"Is there something the matter, miss?"

"Heeereeee!! Pleeeem...hmmm, hmmm" Shimamura struggled to keep her quiet covering her mouth. He hadn't expected her to be so talented at screaming and nobody really knew she could be that loud. The sound of the man approaching got frantic and finally his figure appeared.

It was him..."*The impressive tall man wearing the*

"You lot!! What do you think you're doing!!?"

He thundered out with a strong voice, a voice so str

[041]

"Just keep walking along, old man. This is none of your business" Shimamura tried to sound

menacing.

"Tall words for such a stuck-up brat"

"Did you just call me a brat, asshole!!?"

"You heard me..."

"You have no fucking clue who you're messing with, huh!? You're gonna regret it"

Shimamura took something out of his pocket that made a metal clicking sound and a blade popped out of it. He was holding a knife.

The man kept looking at him, unimpressed at the move.

"Kid, you're going to get hurt if you play with pointy things in the darkness."

The man said in a relaxed tone of voice. To be honest, he didn't feel the least intimidated by all

these kids surrounding him.

Shimamura's face turned red and his temper was gone.

"You really want to push your luck here, don't cha!!?"

Trying to show that he was being serious, he started juggling with the knife, moving it from right to left but it had the opposite effect on the man.

"Hmm, hmm, come on, kid. "

The man looked slightly amused.

Shimamura hesitated. Used to the situation in which he'd take advantage of people's fears once he took the knife out, this was the first time when the target was actually laughing at him. Worse still, he had never been in a serious knife fight before, he had no idea how this would play out but his anger took the best of him.

The man remained calm. Consumed by rage,

Shimamura decided to dash and stab him. Handling the knife in his right hand, he made a rush move towards the man in the sweatshirt, launching a quick stab.

The man swiftly stepped back with his left foot, leaning back his upper body, he avoided the stab, making Shimamura's body wobble.

[042]

The man lifted his left leg like a vaulting bamboo pole that sprung too fast. Catching Shimamura's wrist with his toe, the knife flew towards the pine trees and fell on the sand, hardly making a sound.

"So, you play Karate, Huh!?"

Shimamura tried to sound cool, hiding the fact that his wrist hurt like hell. He was holding it with his other hand.

"Sure, every once in a while" the man said with a grin. He wasn't agitated at all, in fact, he didn't even consider it a serious training match, much less a dangerous situation.

In contrast, the group of kids were totally intimidated by him. Had they started some trouble, they knew that they were in for a painful experience.

"Shit, let's go" Kuromuna said with a frustrated voice and spat on the sand.

Giving a piercing look at the man, Kikuchiyo and Noriko, he clucked and started walking away.

"Mr. Kuromuna!! Wait!!" Shimamura yelled and started running after him, Kato and Shimizu quickly followed.

Kikuchiyo couldn't believe his eyes. He kept looking at the man with a stunned face. That move kept playing in his mind over and over again. It was beautiful, it was unreal. The powerful and

swift movement was not something he'd forget for a long time.

He wanted to say something, but his mouth betrayed him. Only opening it half way, he just breathed without saying anything.

In turn, the man gave a big smile to both of them.

"I'll see you around, friends." said the man with a soft voice.

[043]

"Thank you very much, sir..."

Noriko said to the man, but when she finished the sentence, the man was gone.

He left as fast as when he came to help them.

~ ACT 5

The room was ample and had a wooden floor from end to end. Actually, it was as big as a house but it was a single room. All covered with a wooden floor, it was a very spacious room.

This wasn't a regular room either, instead of a roof, it had an open glass ceiling. Instead of aluminum windows, it had glass windows framed in the wooden walls. Brass locks were built on the windows to be open and closed from the inside. This was a very old building, but it was sturdy.

In the main wall, it had an ink brushed sign that said
The construction used good and sturdy wood
materials to make it withstand the effects of

weather and time. If you were to visit, you would think it was a humble community hall.

Every morning, the sun landed its strongest shine on this wooden floor. Cherry blossom petals carried by the wind would be scattered around it. The beautiful patch of light would be reflected in the slope.

That morning, every window in the room was open. A good looking man in his mid twenties was standing there in his Karate uniform in the center of the wooden floor.

At first, he was standing, but slowly, he knelt down
At a glance, it seemed that it was a kind of rehearse

[045]

But this wasn't a dance, it was far more deadly than that...

He was practicing a rare form of "Ch'in Tai-chi"
This was the Rokka style.

One of the most ancient styles of Ch'in Tai-chi that exist today, compared with practicing the aggressive styles of Karate, he was required to kneel even lower and slow down his movements to achieve the perfect form of the move. To the uninitiated, this would send jolts of pain to his muscles, but his performance was sharp and focused. With a single finger he could cut the darkness with a string of light.

Suddenly, the man movements became as fast as a f

Taijiquan, Tai-chi for short, is a form of Chinese martial arts that was born and developed in Chinkako, a rural area of the Henan province around the 18th century.

Ch'in style had spread around the world and is very popular in Japan as a healthy way to maintain your muscle strength, stamina and overall fitness

even when reaching your senior years.

Tai-chi could be seen as just an exercise that emulates Kung-fu in a non violent way depending on the style. The one that we were observing was the recently introduced "Yoh Version" derived from the original "Ch'in style" that aims to defeat an opponent quickly and aggressively in hand-to-hand combat.

The man beautifully slowed the pace of his electric assaults and softly, as if ending a musical piece, dissolved the melody into the air and gave a solemn ending to his training performance.

The sound of a single person applauding was heard in the training room.

A grizzled man was sitting cross-legged across the room. Maybe in his mid thirties, about ten years older than the man in Karate uniform performing the Tai-chi routine, but nonetheless he still had a young look for his years. Wearing a pair of washed out jeans and a green peppermint T-shirt, his

tanned face could tell us that he enjoyed the outdoors a lot. With a loud laugh, he started clapping and showing a wide smile that brighten the mood of the room.

"Hah! hah! hah!! That was great!!"

[046]

"What do you think of it, did I pull it off?" The man in the Karate uniform asked eagerly.

"You did great, Toshio."

"I practiced it for an hour everyday just as you instructed me, master Hikoroku."

"Once you get comfortable with the Karate drills and Kata, it is hard to master the basics of Chinese

martial arts, especially when you already mastered and perfected Karate. You'd feel thrown out of the loop once you start practicing this. But it seems that's not the case here since you pulled it off wonderfully."

Hikoroku's tone was friendly and reassuring, being the caliber of fighter that he was. He was a man that you should pay attention to when he spoke about fighting.

Yes, His name was Hikoroku Hashiba, sharing a few words of knowledge to his good friend and pupil Toshio Narumi.

"Now you tell me, Toshio, what was your impression of it?"

"I have to recognize that the flow is very similar to advanced Karate but this thing works muscles that I didn't have to use before."

"Hmm, right...but...maybe you noticed something

else?" Hikoroku hinted as if he was looking for a different response.

"Well, if I think of it in a way..." Narumi hesitated for a second.

"You can say it, it's okay, It seems that you are holding back some words there."

"But...well...It seems..."

"Hey, don't worry Toshio, Nobody else besides you and me can pull off the complete form of this ancient style so, you are not going to fight it or defend against it anytime soon."

"I see..."

"So, Tell me..."

"It's designed to kill people." Narumi responded with resolution.

"What? To kill people?"

"What I mean is that the Yoh-Rokka version of Ch'in Tai-chi was created specifically to lay waste to your opponent in a fight. He's not going to walk out alive after first contact."

"Of course, what else did you think Tai-chi was created for?"

"I just realized that. I thought Tai-chi was for..."
Narumi realized how naive he was and stopped talking.

"A gentle exercise to maintain health and fitness until old age and not to be used in actual combat.
That's what you thought of it, correct?"

"Well, yeah..."

"I'm not too happy with the idea of teaching housew

"Many people that practice traditional Chinese mar

"I have to say only half of that is actually true."

"In fact, some people think is not appropriate to promote the practice of Tai-chi in Japan." Narumi remembered a few comments he heard a while ago.

"That's understandable, due to the cultural difference here."

"That correct..."

"Basically, Karate and Tai-chi are the same. Both were basic Martial art styles developed in different countries with the same goal in mind. In a broad sense, we can say that Karate is part of the

Chinese branch of martial arts styles that was simply developed abroad, but keeping its roots and spirit of its original birthplace. Since the goal is the same, you should explore both and find what fits you best."

"I was thinking the same..."

"The way I see it, Karate is the style that fits you the best."

"Yes, that's what I thought..."

"Grab as much as you can from Tai-chi and bring it back to your Karate. In the end, because of all the different personalities, character and physical abilities, people end up making their own style when true fighting is required."

"Master Hikoroku, what kind of style do you practice?"

"Uggh, That's a hard question for me. You see, I have my own style but I haven't really mastered anything yet. Because of my curious personality, I pick things from here and there around the world. You could say I'm "a womanizer of martial arts" I love all and everything that has to do with true fighting."

"Hahaha, you don't need to master anything, everything you do comes out perfect, you are a genius!!"

"You think so? I'm not so sure about that..."
Hikoroku scratched his head, flustered a bit for that remark. It made him feel a little weird.

"Would you have a friendly match with me, Master Hikoroku?" Narumi said, excited.

"Really? With you?"

"Yes, I want to experience how "true fighting" feels

with you, I always wanted to do that."

"How it feels with me...?"

"Yes sir..."

"Be aware, Toshio, that I won't be holding anything back, friendly match or not."

Hikoroku said with a more serious tone in his voice, Implying that this might be, indeed, a real fighting match.

[048]

"I don't mind at all" Narumi nodded nervously.

"Not holding back" In Hikoroku's perspective didn't mean he was going for lethal contact but rather that he was going to use full contact punches and kicks on his opponent's body, twists and grabs that might cause intense pain and perhaps a few sprains or broken bones. Usually, Karate sparring

uses the rule of "sundome" or stopping before the strike hits its intended target.

Karate fighters usually do not like the "sundome rule".
But nonetheless, to effectively train in Karate even

"The Burinkan school" style of Karate where Toshio Narumi belongs to, it is known for having radical rules and it's an unusual branch in the Karate scene of Japan. It uses the full contact style but they also allow strikes to the face, with particular focus on how to deal with such attacks. Narumi is used to dealing with this kind of sparring.

"Aren't you going to get in trouble with the branch chief for fighting with a person that practices a different style? Hikoroku said with a smirk on his face.

"Well, he's not going to know about it if you don't tell him, right? He's your friend after all."

"That's true, but still..." Hikoroku's smile turned somewhat bitter.

It would come as a surprise to you, as seeing him sitting down didn't give it away, that once he stood up, you could see he was impressively tall and a bit skinny. His T-shirt was sort of baggy near his stomach but not because he wasn't fat enough or because he was really skinny, but because his musculature was tightly built underneath it. His neck was pretty thick if you took a good look in front of him.

[049]

"Aren't you going to change?" Narumi asked. The T-shirt was loose enough, but his tight jeans would limit his movements considerably when launching kicks as it is hard to raise your legs that way.

"I've got a few extra uniforms in the back if you feel like using them" Narumi offered Hikoroku.

"Naah, it's okay, I'm fine like this."

Hikoroku's face suddenly turned from relaxed to serious, standing with his legs slightly apart from each other. He let his arms fall side to side in a relaxed way, it was an unorthodox stance but you couldn't tell what he could do next. He was barefoot too.

The change in Hikoroku's attitude puzzled Narumi for a bit and he also started getting ready to face Hikoroku.

"Well, we can start the fight now, I guess?" Narumi said.

"It has already started..." Hikoroku said in a low tone.

Their eyes started glowing with an intense light. Narumi started moving around, showing his footwork. But this wasn't Karate, it was more of

the footwork he uses when he's boxing. His fists were slightly opened. raising his right fist in the upper position while placing his left fist in the lower position. Narumi kept the rhythm of his feet with his elbows and started circling Hikoroku looking for an opening for his initial attack.

But Hikoroku's stance didn't give anything away. He was simply looking at Narumi moving, without showing any particular fighting stance. When Narumi moved behind Hikoroku, he got closer to him, but in a flash, Hikoroku's body was facing Narumi.

"Heyyaah!!" Narumi screamed while getting closer, but he didn't launch any attacks.

Knowing that Hikoroku didn't fall for the bluff, he promptly backed off.

That's when Hikoroku dashed towards Narumi with twice the speed that Narumi was retreating.



It was a move that was impossible to predict. Their distance got even closer with the dash. Trying to stop Hikoroku's dash, Narumi launched a strong high kick with his right leg that came from behind his back. It was an intense flash as if a sharp sword sliced the air around.

But his toes only kicked air.

Hikoroku had already lowered his body quite swiftly. Narumi after kicking, quickly got back to his original position. In that brief moment, Hikoroku sprung and lifted his body closer to Narumi.

Feeling a chill like a thunder through his spine, Narumi launched two elbow attacks consecutively left and right, He was sure that he was going to land at least one attack on Hikoroku's face, but neither of these elbows landed. As if trying to hit a ghost, both elbows cut the air in front of him but Hikoroku's face was still dangerously close to his

own. That's when he smiled to Narumi, incredibly close.

But It wasn't the smile that rocked him, Narumi's body flew across the hall when Hikoroku caught him right square in his chest with some sort of attack that he missed completely.

"Brrwang" A loud sound. He landed over some training gear and was unable to move or even breathe.

It was as if someone had taken all the air from his lungs by force and refused to give him more.

Desperately gasping for air while still on his back, he saw Hikoroku getting close to him slowly.

"W-what was that...?"

"That...my friend.... is *the Hakkesho*."

"Th-the Hakkesho?"

"I told you about it the other time, it came from one of the ancient styles from the Chinese martial arts branch. It has been mostly unknown and almost forgotten."

"I...I couldn't even touch you...." Narumi was still having a hard time breathing.

"By the way, I didn't know we had some audience for this deathmatch."

"W-what!?" Gasping for some air, Narumi couldn't understand.

"That kid looking at us from the window..."

Hikoroku pointed back at one of the windows with his thumb.

"Is that a friend of yours..?"

[052]

"M-my friend you say?" Narumi moved a little bit to look at the window to see who was there.

A thin boy was looking at Hikoroku and Narumi with a perplexed look on his face.

When Narumi made eye contact with him, He looked to the ground immediately.
It was that kid from the other day.

He helped him the other day when some thugs attacked him and the girl that he was with.
It was Kikuchiyo Akuta.

[053]

~ ACT 6

Kikuchiyo was silent when he entered the training hall. Taking off his shoes respectfully, he walked in barefooted. As soon as he was in, he just looked at the floor.

"Why did you follow me? Do you need some help?" Narumi asked a little surprised.
Kikuchiyo simply nodded in response.

Toshio Narumi noticed him as soon as he started his jogging routine the day after he saved the boy and that girl in the woods. Right at the pine tree road, he was running and the kid was standing on the left by the ocean side and looking at the people passing as if he was looking for somebody in particular. Once he made casual eye contact, the kid looked down embarrassed a bit, but Narumi recognized him.

"Hey, what's up?" Narumi said in a friendly tone to the kid, but he was just quiet.

He remembered that this was the boy he saved. Even though he was silent, after he passed him, he felt that he was staring after him for a long time. There was no doubt in Narumi's mind that this boy was waiting for him.

[054]

He didn't find the boy while jogging on his way back. Next day though, the boy would be there and the day after. Every time Narumi tried to say "hi" to him, the boy would look down quietly. Today, he appeared here in the training hall, It came to Narumi's mind that after jogging, he would come to the training hall a few times to spar with some friends and help them on their techniques. Was he being followed by this kid time after time? It seemed that that was this case. But how did he figure that he would be early in the morning today practicing with Hikoroku?

Narumi usually comes here before going to work. His daily routine starts at 6:30 am, he practices until 8:00 and leaves for work. His shift starts at around 9 o'clock. Usually nobody is here at this time but the Master allowed him to come and gave him a spare key.

Toshio Narumi started Karate way back when he was in high school. He must've been coming to this place for more than a decade. Earning the branch owner's trust, he has no problem coming and going from the hall at any time he wishes. Students and martial artists usually arrive at about 12:00 pm for instruction. In special cases, people would come here at about 9:00 am at the earliest. A senior lady that manages the hall. Otake-san, comes at 8:30 am to open the hall, but Narumi would be gone by then. He always makes sure the Hall is locked, even though, there's hardly anything of value that could be stolen from here.

"Who told you that I would be here this early in the morning?"

Narumi asked a bit concerned. The boy didn't say anything. Constantly looking at the wooden floor, without realizing that Narumi was staring at him and frowning a little bit.

The soft sound of a cicada filled the silence of the hall, probably wafting in the wind.

[055]

During the last five minutes, that was the only thing you could hear in the room.

Hikoroku Hashiba was looking at them with his arms crossed, slightly amused by this weird interaction between them. "He's not going to bite you, even if you ask him for a date." He smiled. Because both men were laughing, Kikuchiyo relaxed a little bit and uttered some words, almost whispering.

"An old lady told me..." as if he was talking to the

floor.

"An old lady? I think he means Otake-san" Narum

"Anyway, can you tell me why are you here?"

Once again the boy got silent and Narumi felt that the conversation was going nowhere with these questions, so before waiting for another moment of silence, he asked:

"Do you want to learn Karate, don't you?"

The expression of the boy got excited and he nodded his head quickly.

"If you come in the afternoon, you can register for the main instruction. There will be plenty of friendly people that can help you, don't worry."

The boy frowned and shook his head. That wasn't what he wanted.

"Don't you want to join the Karate Dojo?"
The boy shook his head.

"I thought you wanted to learn Karate, right?" The boy nodded.

"Well, why won't you join then?" The boy shook his head.

"Toshio, hear me out" Hikoroku spoke from behind the boy, as if a shadow of a mountain suddenly had appeared behind Kikuchiyo.

"I think the boy wants to learn your Karate style directly from you" Uncrossing his arms, Hikoroku's tone of voice got serious. Maybe the boy saw that Tai-chi technique, heard all that stuff about how dangerous it was and wanted to snatch it for himself too.

"Is that what you want?" Narumi asked kindly. The boy's attitude brighten up and he started

nodding intensely.

He looked at him and thought that this kid was like one of those strange child actors that are a little odd at first, but completely dedicated to their beloved craft once you get them on stage.

Kikuchiyo was shaking but he was definitively committed in learning the particular style that Narumi forged for himself. That wasn't an easy task, Narumi remembered....

[056]

Yes, he remembered those old days. He was about 11. Abusive kids were always around messing with people, but he didn't want to be taken for a fool. He wanted to have the power to punch them really hard.

He dedicated himself to improving his skills and looks. But also saved his life and gave him the direction and discipline necessary to succeed.

"You want to be strong too, right?" said Narumi.

Kikuchiyo's body was quivering while he was still looking down. He was making tight fists and his face had some water drops running down from it. Narumi knew how the boy felt, he had experienced it first hand too. Been there, done that, Karate was needed.

"Sure, if that's what you want, I will teach you my Karate style" Narumi asserted. He was Kikuchiyo's age back then and he also found somebody strong that wanted to emulate, this was his turn in life.

"Alright..." Kikuchiyo said with a resilient voice.

"Alright!!" Like an echo bouncing inside his mind, heart and soul, he kept repeating inside of him.

"Alright!!"

"Alright!!"

[057]

~ ACT 7

Toshio Narumi started training the young Kikuchiyo Akuta in the fighting arts of Karate. They'd always start very early in the mornings. They made an agreement before starting.

"I will train you only if you show up in the hall while I'm here. When you don't, then I won't either."

With that condition, Narumi would train Kikuchiyo in the special Karate that he forged for himself. Everyday. No matter how early Narumi show up in the hall, Kikuchiyo would be always there waiting for him anxious for morning practice.

The first thing Narumi did was to measure Kikuchiyo's physical fitness.

[058]

He didn't resort to any machines or systems to do so. He would simply observe how many squats Kikuchiyo could perform, How flexible he was or how much he could run around the block without getting exhausted. Before starting the lessons, he wanted to see his natural potential.

Unfortunately, compared to kids his age, he was way below the average mark.

Doing squats---- By standing and crouching constantly, you push your body to a movement that is unnatural. It's certainly harder to do than it looks, but still the boy did them poorly. Definitively this wasn't a good start, his flexibility was mediocre for a boy his age.

Then, it came the time to test his resistance, he sprinted for a short distance but he ran quite slow and he was instantly out of breath. To build up some resistance, he and Narumi would go jogging for a distance close to a decent marathon run. Kikuchiyo started poking his chin forward and started lagging behind.

But not all of his characteristics were lackluster, there were a few traits that Narumi noticed about this boy that made him quite unusual. There were two most noticeable ones that he started observing.

"Don't push yourself so hard!! You're overdoing it!!"

He would often call Kikuchiyo about his push up sets. He suggested a "soft level" 3 sets of 8 push ups to begin, but while he was doing something else, Kikuchiyo had done 127 push ups in a single set.

Narumi figured that, because of his skinny arms,

the soft level may leave him exhausted. He was expecting that Kikuchiyo would give up after 10 or so, but never expected those skinny arms to do more than ten times what it was expected of him. The kid looked fine and in good spirits after that.

The average athlete's arms would have been gone after a stunt like that. There are experts at push ups that can pull off 300, 500 and even 3000 in a single hour. These are remarkable athletes with years of constant training and dedication. A kid from the street with hardly any training pulling this number was not normal!!

But the explanation for this was quickly caught by Narumi's keen observation.

Kikuchiyo's right arm was strangely strong. Almost three times stronger than the left. He made him do push ups with only one arm until he felt he couldn't go anymore. Kikuchiyo did 37 push ups with the right arm but when it was time to use his left arm, he did only one and he was done.

Kikuchiyo noticed how impressed Narumi was with his push ups that he started focusing in working even more on them and he felt good. To the point that he was doing them all the time. It was hard for him to do two or three with the left, but if the motivation was there, He could do 100 or maybe 200 with his right on a good day, and almost twice the amount of regular push ups when in reality, it was the right arm doing most of the work.

The second thing that Narumi noticed that startled him a bit was his freak endurance during a marathon. He would get tired really fast when he ran with Narumi around the city, but when he ran by himself in the hall, he showed his unbelievable resistance.

One time Narumi ordered him to run around the training hall without stopping or taking a break to measure how long he would keep at it. He told him

just to run at his own pace. When one can run at one's leisure, It is imperative not only to have a good physical condition but also a strong mentality. It is known that morale will fade faster than physical strength.

That morning, Kikuchiyo ran from 6:30 am to 8:00 am, looking down all the time. Narumi felt tempted to call in from work and ask permission in the Dojo to see how much more he would endure. The psychological resilience of Kikuchiyo Akuta was simply unbelievable. In a battle against himself or his tolerance against pain made Narumi feel even a little uneasy. If he were to tell him "do squats, run around and punch the bag until I come back" and didn't return, he would stay there doing that until the next morning.

"He's that kind of person." Narumi thought to him

As he was discovering Kikuchiyo's unusual talents,

"He saw it once, what if he gets obsessed with that?"

"We're sending them home with dangerous knowled

[060]

~ACT 8

Kikuchiyo Akuta, The frail and silly kid as we know him, was about to be reborn into a lethal human weapon.

Practicing Karate was fun for him. He loved it dearly, dedicating all his time, energy and money to it. He started seeing the positive results that his hard work brought in his own body.

That only fueled the intensity of his practice and the harder he pushed himself, the better the results were. He was truly happy for having Karate as an

integral part of his life.

His resistance to running got much better from the beginning and he felt proud running toe to toe with his master. He'd never tried to pass him, just running at his pace relaxed him.

Also his push ups increased. After a month, he could do 300 push ups with both arms, a hundred in 4 sets with his left only but a single set of 300 with only his right arm.

[061]

He was glad to have found something exciting and rewarding to do while he was alone. Rather than just doing Karate for practice's sake, he was glad to be left alone with his Karate.

He finally had a reason to cherish his loneliness.

Karate provided constant excitement but once he

started reaching the next level, he felt hungrier for more power and knowledge and practiced more intensely.

Religiously, he would learn Karate from Narumi in the morning. After he'd leave for work, he would practice by himself. Repeating the drills and methods hundred of times, the ones that Narumi taught him and a few others that he researched himself.

To enhance his character and psychological resilience

The only actual fighting techniques Narumi taught Kikuchiyo were a few practical kicks, some jabs and the basic karate stances. Narumi emphasized that he needed to obtain more power, make his body more flexible and master the basics as second nature to be able to continue to the more advanced techniques.

He also mentioned that Kikuchiyo didn't need to perform Kata or engage in "Kumite" for the time

being, there would be plenty of time for that later.

Kikuchiyo wasn't in a rush for anything, he didn't seem annoyed by the repetitive drills and exercises that seemed to continue endlessly. Sometimes, he would practice the same kick for six hours until the blisters on the sole of his feet would gradually break off and were bleeding.

[062]

He made a post with some wood and straws and started striking it for half a day. The skin in his knuckles cracked and his blood colored the post red almost immediately.

Narumi got infuriated at Kikuchiyo for such a reckless move. Once he saw his injured knuckles he berated him for not knowing when to stop. That was nothing to be proud about.

By the evening, Kikuchiyo started jogging the same

trail that Toshio Narumi used to run with him, the road with the pine trees with the breeze of the sea on the left. These days though, Narumi wasn't jogging. He was training in Burinkan for the national Karate tournament that was about to happen in the fall. Kikuchiyo had not talked to Noriko Izawa since the library incident of that day, many months ago.

When they did come across in school, they would exchange a small greeting and that was it. Greeting and slightly smiling was a great achievement for Kikuchiyo since he wasn't a person that was used to talking to girls or women without feeling weird about it. This time it was different. There was a confidence in him and a look that sent a message. Noriko didn't bring up any conversation about the experience of that day but she started looking at him in a different way.

It wasn't favorable at all though, but she didn't hate him or wanted to ignore him either. He was just a

weird guy that was different from the other men at school, That was her simple perspective about him.

She still remembered him carrying a box with legless creatures with him. How weird can you be to be doing stuff like that? Gross.

But it was one of the handful of times he saw her after the incident. He saw her once walking towards school on summer break and a few other times while he was jogging before his evening Karate session.

It was around this time when Kikuchiyo's mother, Saeko, disappeared from his life.

It was the last day of school before vacation time in Isogahara junior high school.

When he returned home from school, the house was strangely clean and straighten out.

[063]

It definitely appeared that it was someone else's

house. He called his mother's name as usual, even though he knew that she wasn't around. The weird silence that followed answered his call.

He checked her closet, but none of her clothes were there. All her things were gone.

Finally, a thought crossed his mind.

"We are all alone!!!" she screamed that night....

"I won't be fooled!!!" Her face looked ghastly that ti

He pictured her shattering the jaw of the dog's corpse. Her voice sounding terrifying and unearthly

that night. A beautiful woman like her, doing things like that.

He entered his room, so clean and neat, when was the last time he was here?

Between all his things, there was his bank account book and a seal with it.

The account name was his name and the amount

that was there was around 300.000 yen.

There wasn't a single message, letter or note telling him of her whereabouts.

Just the amount she left for him and her missing things was clear enough to realize that she left and she wasn't going to return. They were not going to see each other again.

But there was no indication that she left today.

If she left, it was the day that he got attacked by the dog, she was drunk and cut the dog's neck and shattered his skull screaming that all of us are alone in the world and have to fend for ourselves. She never left any messages before, why would it be different this time?

But it was...She kept saying that if Kikuchiyo someday would leave but she'll follow him, the day finally arrived.

But she was the one that left that day, and Kikuchiyo wasn't going to follow her, why for? She hugged him, cried and promised things but in the end. she forged her own path that freed her from her problems, just like when he found Karate and a better life because of it.

He felt that a woman has the right to choose to live the way she wants. Her problems weren't his concern. He felt that the woman that left wasn't his mother at all, just some passerby that offered some help before leaving as many people do.

"Surviving alone....Living alone...."

That concept rolled into his heart like a little stone rolls down from a mountain.

~ACT 9

Kikuchiyo went out jogging that very evening. The weather was pleasant and without school for the next few months, he could dedicate more time to practicing Karate. The idea made him happy and what better time to kick off the school break than right away.

He trailed the same route that he and Narumi had used every day. He was simply enjoying his inner peace and his running pace was relaxed. The view of the sea behind the pine trees was beautiful. He ran to feel the ground under his shoes. He ran ev

The wind was mixing the scent of the pine trees with the smell of the sea, creating a delicate breeze.

He was jogging at his usual time but winter made the days shorter and the moon and stars would be up there sooner than usual, the place was becoming

darker quite fast.

Running through a curved slope for a mile or so, a shadow popped in front of him.

"Hey, you!!"

It was Shimamura. The moment he stopped, he felt two people sneaking behind him.

"You're not going to escape today, bitch." Kato said.

Fearing the worst, he turned around quickly, just to be ambushed by Shimamura.

He caught him from one arm.

[066]

He had wondered where they had been. Shimamura and Kato hadn't showed up at school ever since the attack. While recovering from the surprise, he

heard Shimamura say.

"I know you always run here with your friend, but he's busy lately ain't he?"

Shimamura pulled his arm and Kato grabbed the other.

"Come on, bro, we got something cool to show ya!"

Both of them were wearing their familiar gangster clothing and had dirty smiles on their faces. Their trap was working great. They dragged Kikuchiyo

with them. He tried to fight back a bit but he wasn't putting too much resistance and they didn't let him go. They were laughing and dragged him towards an isolated area behind the pine tree forest.

Once they arrived to an area that was far from the main roads, Kikuchiyo noticed three shadows in

the dark. It was Shimizu, the High school student Kuromuna and...Noriko Izawa!!

"Uh.....Uh?"

Kikuchiyo wanted to say something but his lips were shaking.

The school blouse and skirt that Noriko was wearing were torn. Her hips and breasts were dimly visible in the dark. She was making muffled sounds with teary eyes because her panties and bra were jammed into her mouth and her mouth was tied with a rope so tight that the pressure was squeezing hard the edges of her mouth.

It was Kuromuna the one restraining her from the back. He put his left hand over her shoulder, under a piece of cloth that used to be her blouse.

Grabbing her left breast, He started squeezing it hard.

He was clawing it so hard that the breast was changing its shape it was painful.

"You were the fucker that killed my dog, ain't cha?" Kuromuna said suddenly.

Kikuchiyo was silent but he didn't look down.

"Don't ever bother denying it or saying anything because I know the truth."

He said it impatiently as he was about to lick his chops.

"I got a pal that goes to Burinkan. He told me a few days ago that he saw the kid that killed my dog attending Burinkan early in the morning. That same kid with a crazy old bitch went to the park and dumped something that looked suspicious. He was drunk that time and he threw up all night because of what he saw. He's the same one that told me that my dog was dead."

"....."

"He told me that the kid secretly practices Karate every morning there."

That was when Kuromuna gave a menacing look at Kikuchiyo.

"So you practice Karate when nobody sees you, huh?"

He pressed her breast harder, her eyes closed even tighter, whimpering in pain.

Kikuchiyo was looking at her face without glancing down. She had a really delicate and beautiful face. Noriko's looks without bra or underwear gave a jolt of excitement to Kikuchiyo. It was blowing his brains away. Under his training pants, he felt his beastly thing was lifting up menacingly.

"Don't get distracted, you fuck!! I'm talking to you!!" Kuromuna screamed at top of his lungs.

The three men were laughing with wicked laughs.

"This bitch is great, My brother that works in Yokohama told me she's pretty famous there."

[068]



[068]

Noriko's face was really pale.

"Don't feel bad about her, she's used to things like this. She prostitutes herself in Yokohama. She gets a lot of money, especially from foreign black dudes that want to fuck a Japanese thing. She's the best fuck in town I tell ya. She get so many cocks per night that she's running the market dry there."

"....."

"Hey, we're in luck tonight. My brother's boss paid 40.000 yen to ram his cock into her dirty pussy."

You gonna watch us fuck her for free,
brother...hahahahah...."

Kuromuna's face was covered in sweat. He was sweating buckets while his eyes had a sinister glow. He was holding a knife with his right hand and cut the last pieces of cloth she was wearing.

She was fully naked now.

The moon glow was shining over her delicate body. Even in winter, as in summer, her pale skin would shine without showing any swimsuit or underwear marks. So white, so pure....

"Take off his clothes too!!" Kuromuna ordered the other guys around.

Kato grabbed him from behind, restraining his arms while Shimamura squatted in front of him and pulled down his pants quickly.

Shimamura was surprised when a big, thick rod

violently pointed at his face, it was his hard bloodshot penis.

"DAAAAMNNN, look at this thing, he's ready to go."

Shimamura stood up, spat and smirked to him.

"So, you wanna fuck her too, huh?" He got in the face of Kikuchiyo.

"Come on, say it." Shimamura was breathing on his face and was getting impatient.

Kikuchiyo didn't make a sound. This time though, he wasn't looking down. He was looking straight at his eyes.

"Answer me, motherfucker!!"

And he suddenly threw a hard punch at him.

His cheekbones made a groaning noise.

Next, Shimamura punched his stomach. He started punching his stomach repeatedly with both fists and then he punched his face again.

Kikuchiyo felt a warm stream of liquid coming from his nose and a thick slime with a metallic flavor started invading his mouth. It had an insipid smell.

There was something hard pinching his tongue. It was a broken tooth.

"Where's your Karate now, bitch!!? Come on and use it!!" Shimamura screamed at him.

Kato kept shaking his body and pressing back. That's when Shimamura threw a punch right into his nose.

"Guugh!!" Kikuchiyo made a desperate sound while trying to fend off his punch. As hard as he tried, He couldn't free himself from

Kato's arms that were grabbing him from behind. Moving his body desperately to free himself only to get repeatedly punched in the face, Kikuchiyo started feeling that he was out of options.

Worse than that, He started feeling that he was *drown*. Something dark, thick, metallic, red, sharp, slimy at

He wanted to purge it. He wished he could open his mouth and vomit it. Invading his stomach, his lungs, his mouth, his eyes, the back of his nose. This thing was going to squeeze the life out of him. He was violently shaking his arms and screaming to the sky trying to purge the thing out.

Kato panicked a bit and let him go.

Kikuchiyo fell over his knees onto the sand with his legs knotted with his underpants. He was still trying to move but the sand underneath him was red from the blood of his mouth.

"Bwleghh..." He threw up....and then....

"Hiwuuuaahhgghhh" He gave a desperate scream.

"Hahahah!! What the fuck!? Your best Karate move is just screaming?" Shimamura joked.

While Kikuchiyo was coughing and trying to vomit, Shimamura ran and kicked him in the face.

Kato moved to him too and started kicking his butt. Noriko in turn, was pushed down to the sand and Kuromuna mounted her over. He pulled down his pants and his bare butt was moving trying to find a position in between Noriko's legs.

[070]

Shimizu moved towards Noriko, pushing down both her arms with his leg and his right arm. He was fondling her right breast with his left hand. It was a pitiful scene devoid of humanity,

mercy and common sense. Everyone seemed to be out of their minds.

Looking around he saw images in front of his eyes passing in a flash.

Kato's fists, Shimamura's arms, Kuromuna's bare bottom, Noriko's anguished face.

Once again, the nauseating feeling returned. His stomach contracted and flexed and he vomited. He vomited something warm and sour that flew towards the ground.

He kept vomiting many times, even while being pun

His stomach was empty, yet it didn't come out as he A dark red lump of something thick was overtaking all his body. It didn't come out from his body because it was stuck in his flesh, Blocking the air from entering his lungs, blocking his heart from pumping more blood, disabling his thoughts.

Kikuchiyo was crying out of desperation and a shriek of freedom was finally heard.

"Wuuurrryayyarrhhhhh" He stood up holding a heavy piece of rock that he felt surprisingly light, maybe because he was holding it with his right hand. Shimamura didn't see it coming, the last thing he saw was Kikuchiyo standing up in front of him.
and the lights went out.

This was because Kikuchiyo walked to him and smashed his head with the rock.

Shimamura's feet got lifted from the ground and he flew after a horrible fast strike that caught him with full force and when his limp body hit the ground, there was a ring of blood that started spreading out in the sand coming from his face.

"AHH!!" Kato wasn't prepared for what he had just witnessed, but soon was his turn.

Kikuchiyo turned fast, trying to bash his head too, but grazed his forehead instead.

Marked with a bloody cut, Kato's survival instinct kicked in...

He turned around and ran away.

Kato ran as fast as he could but Kikuchiyo caught him easily. Running from behind, he gave him a body push so hard that Kato crashed head on into a pine tree. Holding the pine tree, he fell unconscious but kept holding the tree. Kikuchiyo, trying to stay one step ahead of any movements from Kato, jumped and smacked his neck with the rock, two, three times. He even kicked him but Kato simply hugged the tree and slid down leaving a profuse trail of blood on the tree. His eyes were bleeding.

He hadn't used any of the techniques he had learned, it had all been done with pure brute force.

Turning around quickly, he ran towards Kuromuna that was still mounting Noriko. Oblivious of the grotesque scene and the mortal danger behind him.

It was too late.....

"WURRYYYAAHHH"

Fixated in targeting his head, Kikuchiyo ran towards him holding the rock in his hand and smashed the back of Kuromuna's head so hard that it sent him stumbling towards Noriko.

The force with which the heavy rock landed on him stumbled Kuromuna, but he was still moving while Noriko was giving muffled gasps with the underwear inside her mouth.

Kuromuna stood up so he smashed his head again, and again.

He stumbled and tried to run away but Kikuchiyo smashed his face again. Striking him sideways, striking him from the top, smashing him over and over. Kikuchiyo jumped over his body.

He was still moving on the ground so Kikuchiyo smashed him more and thought....

"Smash him!!"

"Smash him!!"

"His Eyes are falling off"

"Doesn't matter, keep smashing him!!

"Smash him!!"

"Smash him!!"

"His skull is opening up"

"Don't stop, smash him, smash him more!!"

"Smash him!!"

"Smash him!!"

Kuromuna finally stopped moving, Shimizu was nowhere to be found, he was gone from the place. Kikuchiyo crouched over the lifeless body and started wailing loudly while still holding that bloody rock. Noriko had lost consciousness after witnessing the cold blooded carnage. Kuromuna's

blood was slowly rolling down her chest.

The wind was slowly blowing around the pine branches over Kikuchiyo's head.

Feeling the fresh air from the sea mixed with the scent of the pine trees in his lungs. Hearing the sound of the trees. Having the far away call of the waves with the image of the full moon over a dark, starless sky.

That's when he finally could cry wholeheartedly towards the sky. Trying to make sense to the madness that had been violently unleashed towards him and Noriko recently.

It happened at this moment, at this place....

Loneliness finally embraced him.

CHAPTER 1: THE CHIKUSHO FIST

----THE END--- to be continued.

